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SCRIPTURE, SECTS, AND SHAKESPEARE:
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A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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For my father, John Ashenbach – *requiescat in pace*.

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Abstract

Scripture, Sects, and Shakespeare: Rupture and Reconciliation on the Early Modern Stage explores how Shakespearean drama is shaped by and responds to the Protestant Reformation's crisis of hermeneutical authority. With the widespread practice of *sola Scriptura* across Western Christendom came a concomitant rise in private judgment among Christians, whereby the individual treats himself as his own highest exegetical authority in interpreting scripture. In this project, I argue that several of Shakespeare's plays evince an unease towards the religious and social fragmentation that resulted from private judgment, and that the dramatist answers this problem in his works through the rehabilitation of what I call interpersonal faith, that is, the individual's entrustment of hermeneutic authority to another living person or group of persons. Beginning with *Twelfth Night*, I show how Shakespeare dramatizes the struggle between internal and external modes of interpretive authority as that conflict was represented in the anti-Puritan discourse of English conformist writers. Reading the play against this religious backdrop, I argue that in contrast to Malvolio, who prefers a private paradigm of interpretation that leads him into error, Viola proves to be the play's more perceptive reader by looking to the oral testimony of others for verification of her own hopes. In this chapter, I demonstrate how the play's comic resolution is shaped by means of a communal hermeneutic espousing attributes of humility, shared memory, and self-sacrifice that conformist writers were calling their Puritan opponents to embrace if they are to read the Scriptures rightly. If *Twelfth Night* presents interpretive authority as deriving from an insider's knowledge of a specific community's living tradition, *Hamlet* explores the religious and political problems that arose within England as a result of replacing one hermeneutical authority figure with another. In my second chapter, I argue that the epistemological crisis Hamlet experiences in reaction to Gertrude's remarriage reflects Catholic

concerns towards reform of the English Church and the assertion of royal supremacy. Additionally, I demonstrate how in *Hamlet*'s depiction of the political threat which the prince's ideals pose to Denmark's new *status quo*, the play casts a tragic light on the conflict between disaffected Catholics and the Protestant state. The third chapter examines how *Othello* dramatizes the value of interpersonal faith and the limitations of *sola Scriptura* for sustaining Christian community. Reading Desdemona as figurative for the church, I show how Othello's own judgment and reasoning prove sufficient in explaining his wife's love for him to the Venetian senate, but they fail to withstand the challenge posed by Iago, whose hermeneutic of suspicion towards Desdemona resonates with the protestant critique of the Roman Church as the "whore of Babylon". The play positions Othello in such a way, I argue, that if Othello held an interpersonal faith in Desdemona's fidelity, his reason and imagination would be anchored in that direction as well, stimulating him to generate possibilities for how the evidence presented to him can be reconciled with his wife's faithfulness. In my final chapter, I examine how *The Winter's Tale* imbues the exercise of interpersonal faith with a sense of the miraculous in its ability to radically transform one's own perception of the world. While criticism has focused on Hermione's resurrection as *The Winter's Tale*'s most important exploration of the miraculous, my claim is that this *seeming* conversion of stone into flesh at the play's end signifies a more authentic miracle, which is the changing of Leontes' hardened mind. Although it is common to think of Shakespearean drama as celebrating practically unlimited human autonomy, this project demonstrates that the playwright was critical of privatized religion's corrosive effects on communal ties, and shows how his works contended for the free assent to a shared interpretive authority as the basis for an integrated society.

Introduction

In the opening act of *The Merchant of Venice*, what begins as a business meeting between two Christians and a Jewish moneylender to secure a loan of three thousand ducats quickly turns into a pointed debate over Scriptural passages concerning livestock. Chafing at Antonio's aversion to usury, Shylock recalls the biblical narrative in which Laban and Jacob agree that the latter's wages would include any spotted newborn lambs produced from Laban's flock, and in order to maximize his share, Jacob places striped rods in the troughs, inducing the animals to produce spotted offspring. "This was a way to thrive, and he was blest," Shylock says of Jacob, "And thrift is blessing, if men steal it not" (85-86).[1] In response to this interpretation, Antonio asserts that Jacob was entitled to the spotted lambs because of his service to Laban and attributes their procreation to the power of God, upon which Antonio asks Shylock if his citation of Genesis was "inserted to make interest good?" (90). "I cannot tell, I make it breed as fast," (92) Shylock says, self-satisfied with his exegesis, prompting Antonio to remark:

> Mark you this, Bassanio,
> The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.
> An evil soul producing holy witness
> Is like a villain with a smiling cheek,
> A goodly apple, rotten at the heart.
> O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath! (92-98)

Antonio's words are a damning judgment of Shylock, as he casts the Jew in the familiar role of Satanic villain and charges him with abusing the Scriptures. They are also Antonio's way of resolving a problem, at least to his and Bassanio's satisfaction: if both Antonio and Shylock revere the Old Testament and posit an interpretation of the text in support of their conflicting

[1] William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*. All references to Shakespeare's plays and sonnets in this study are taken from the Arden Shakespeare editions and will hereafter be cited parenthetically.

views, how is one to judge between them? Antonio's accusation allows him to distinguish his reading as the godly and correct one, while branding Shylock's as demonic and false. And yet, Antonio has merely scored rhetorical points here and magnified a hermeneutical problem rather than provide a principled way of solving it. If the "devil can cite Scripture for his purpose" as Antonio says, cannot an "evil soul" characterize its interpretation as angelic and frame that of the righteous person as wicked – indeed, should we not *expect* it to do so?

Antonio and Shylock's dispute over biblical interpretation would have been a familiar sight to Christians in Shakespeare's audience, not because they often saw their fellow faithful arguing with Jews over Scripture, but because they had grown so used to witnessing Christians arguing with each other.[2] Despite their mutual love of the Bible, Western Christians had become deeply divided over its interpretation, and by the time Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice* at the close of the sixteenth-century, debate was raging in England and across Europe over all manner of issues ranging from the use of religious images to the practice of infant baptism. Those on opposite sides of these theological controversies argued that theirs was the biblical view, and like Antonio, condemned competing interpretations as diabolical perversions of the Scriptures. Within England, some of the most distinct levels on which the fragmentation of Western Christianity could be felt were the country's schism from Roman Catholic Christendom as well as nonconformity of Englishmen to their country's established church. As Thomas Docherty observes, each of these ruptures are demonstrative of a crisis of authority during the Protestant Reformation – a crisis which saw "a conflict between one mode of authority whose source is external, 'other-directed' (in Rome, say), and another mode which

[2] On the Jewish population in Shakespeare's England, James Shapiro estimates there were "probably never more than a couple of hundred at any given time in the whole country, a very small number in a population of roughly four million, and a small number even in relationship to the number of aliens residing in London" in *Shakespeare and the Jews*, 76.

claims internal, self-directed authority (in England, or more fundamentally, in the 'self')."[3] Fuelled by the country's emerging self-image as empire, reformation in England saw religious power spread along nationalist lines from the pope to the monarch. Among nonconforming Englishmen, "Papists" continued to credit Rome with universal spiritual authority, whereas mass production of the vernacular Bible aided "Puritans" and other radical Protestants in assuming religious power at the individual level, as they pointed to the Scriptures as their highest guide. While dissemination of the printed Bible during the Reformation produced new and vibrant forms of piety, it also stimulated widespread divisions within England and across Western Christendom, whereby nations, churches, and individuals fought over the meaning of Scripture. Although many reformers encouraged the laity to read the vernacular Scriptures in the hope of promulgating a single biblical faith, the proliferation of religious sects and exegetical conflict suggests that the triumph of their age was not the subjection of the individual's will to Scripture, but the subordination of Scripture to each individual's will.

This study examines how Shakespearean drama was shaped by the Reformation crisis of hermeneutical authority. This question is vital for Shakespeare studies because drama is built upon action, and dramatic action involves conflict between characters whose respective visions of the world vie for legitimacy over the course of the play. In what manner and to what extent those conflicts are resolved depends on the play's particular genre, whether it be comedy,

[3] Thomas Docherty, *On Modern Authority*, 49. Docherty notes that the conceptualization of the word "authority" underwent a radical transformation during this period, as it shifted from meaning "a power, sanctioned by tradition, to which one submitted" to implying "a power of instigation or innovation on the part of an individual capable of choice" (47-48). In *Early Modern Writing and the Privatisation of Experience*, Nick Davis emphasizes how this transformation involved "a general cultural movement away from the placing of predominant trust in the self's shared, publicly acknowledged or mediated experience, and towards identification of a person's individual, self-scrutinizing mind, inherently invisible to others, as the primary locus of authentic perception, thought and feeling" (2).

tragedy, romance, or otherwise. Behind Shylock and Portia's confrontation in *The Merchant of Venice*'s trial scene, for example, is a clash between Old Testament rigor and New Testament mercy. The play ultimately espouses the ideals of the latter and settles on a happy ending conventional to comedy, but its resolution is tainted with ambivalence owing to the Christian characters arguably failing to practice what Portia preaches in their treatment of Shylock. Whether it is the struggle between aristocracy and populism in *Coriolanus* or the battle of the sexes in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare's plays are built on the collision of different worldviews. At the time Shakespeare was writing his plays, *the* great drama unfolding before him that would redefine how Western Christians understood themselves, their world, and their God was the struggle regarding who possesses hermeneutical authority over the Bible, the text which, Christopher Hill remarks, "was central to all intellectual as well as moral life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."[4] Because the Scriptures were considered the Word of God in early modern England and Europe, interpretation of its words meant interpretation of reality. As an author using language to understand and represent the world around him, Shakespeare would have found in the hermeneutical crisis a powerful source of dramatic capital for his work, but also an issue that went to heart of his occupation as both a playwright and an actor. For if "All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players" (2.7.14041) as Jaques declares in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare saw those inhabiting the *theatrum mundi* of his time descending into chaos over how to understand the sacred script left to them by their divine playwright.

[4] Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution*, 20.

Despite occurring roughly seventy years before Shakespeare wrote his earliest drama, Luther's break with Rome as well as his subsequent conflicts with Erasmus and Thomas More represent a foundational starting point in the sixteenth-century for discussing the fundamental problems of interpretive authority and the individual's relationship to the community that characterized the early modern hermeneutical crisis. On April 18, 1521, Martin Luther stood before the Diet of Worms to answer whether he would recant any of the positions he expressed in several books of his which the diet had laid before him. Initially, Luther responded by distinguishing between those books that merely encourage a healthy devotional life which even his opponents could not fault, other writings critical of the papacy, as well as polemical works that Luther admitted occasionally lapsed into uncharitable rhetoric but whose points he believed were sound.[5] Asked to give an answer "without loops and holes" to the diet's behest that he recant, Luther famously declared:

> Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have qquoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience.[6]

Unlike his disputations with Cardinal Cajetan and Johann Eck in previous years, Luther was not summoned before the emperor, electors, and princes to explain the details of his scriptural hermeneutics, but to simply answer whether he would renounce any of his works. Excommunicated by Leo X only a few months earlier, Luther now faced the combined power of church and empire at Worms, and yet he answered in kind with a response that shook Western Christendom to its foundation. By locating his religious beliefs primarily in the Scriptures and only accepting doctrines that he could find within its text, Luther sought to bypass the

[5] Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil*, 38-39.
[6] Martin Luther, "Luther at the Diet of Worms," 112.

institutional church that had controlled biblical exegesis and promulgated articles of faith for centuries, opting instead to interpret the written Word himself and formulate his beliefs accordingly.[7] In making his statement at Worms, Luther was not only asserting that the church hierarchy could not be trusted to interpret Scripture properly, but he was insisting that there was no *need* for him to trust it. For Luther, to do so would be to trust mere words rather than *the* Word, which he could grasp with own fingertips and read with his own eyes.

The authority to judge doctrine according to the rule of Scripture is a power that Luther did not just claim for himself, but is one that he believed all Christians must exercise as a birthright of their baptism and membership in a universal priesthood. The individual Christian, Luther claims, "judges and discerns with the greatest certainty the dogmas and opinions of all men."[8] Luther's democratizing approach to interpretive authority was complemented by his insistence that the Scriptures should be read through a plain, literal sense and that the biblical text was "entirely secure, easy, and open through itself; it interprets itself, testing, judging and illuminating everything."[9] William Tyndale, whose vernacular translation of the Scriptures helped inspire an evangelical reading culture in England and became a model for later English Bibles, shared Luther's conviction about the perspicuity of the Scriptures, writing that the Bible "hath but one simple, literal sense, whose light the owls cannot abide."[10] Like Luther, Tyndale hoped for a day when the common man would have the Bible in his own hands and could read it

[7] This is not to say that in Luther's estimate the insights of councils, tradition, and church fathers should not be consulted when one is attempting to understand the Scriptures, but rather that their claims should be rejected if they contradict the Bible. In this way, *sola Scriptura* leaves the individual exegete to judge when these authorities contravene the Bible and when they do not.
[8] Luther, "The Bondage of the Will," 90.
[9] Ibid, *Assertio omnium articulorum per bullam Leonis X. novissimam damnatorum*, 97. See also Richard Simpson, *Burning to Read*, 116.
[10] William Tyndale, "The Preface of Master William Tyndale that he made before the Five Books of Moses called Genesis," 4.

himself, not so that each person might devise his own unique interpretation and claim it equal to all others, but that the reader might imbibe the Word's meaning that Luther and Tyndale themselves believed the Scriptures so clearly expressed. As James Simpson argues, however, there was an important polemical stake in evangelical claims for the clarity of the Scriptures:

> Anyone claiming to reform an institution on the basis of textual authority needed that text to be prior to the institution. They needed the text to be unambiguous. They also needed to be able to claim that everyone could see the force of that unambiguous reading. The essential polemical claim made by evangelical writers in the early sixteenth century was that Scripture preceded the Church . . . Without that claim of absolute, non-negotiable scriptural priority, evangelicals were vulnerable to the authority of the institution they challenged, an institution that claimed legitimacy from unwritten traditions.[11]

Despite what David Steinmetz has called the "exegetical optimism of early Protestantism",[12] Luther's disputes with Ulrich Zwingli and others over the Eucharist presaged future interpretive conflicts that would plague the Reformation and began exposing a tension between the doctrine of Scripture's perspicuity and actual interpretive practice. This disparity was further evinced by the proliferation of Protestant reading aids for the Bible. "Soon even the most vocal champions of the clarity of Scripture were accompanying their Bible translations with prefaces and marginal notes to guide readers to the true sense of the text," Daniel Eppley observes, "as well as publishing an endless stream of commentaries, interpretive guides, and rebuttals of competing interpretations."[13] Repulsed by what he saw as the manipulation of Scripture on the part of medieval exegetes, Luther wanted to let the Bible speak for itself, and his precept that Scripture performs its own interpretive work suggests a desire to purge the individual's encounter with the Word of any potentially contaminating human elements. Nevertheless, the issue of interpretation continually manifested itself in Luther's disputes with his theological opponents, as when he

[11] Simpson, 118-19.
[12] David Steinmetz, *Luther in Context*, 96.
[13] Daniel Eppley, *Reading the Bible with Richard Hooker*, xxiv.

complained in his 1525 letter to the Christians of Antwerp that the devil was inspiring the "ungodly" to proclaim "all sorts of chimerical follies and extravagant doctrines", resulting in "as many sects and beliefs as there are heads."[14] Luther's belief in the perspicuity of Scripture allowed him to ostensibly solve and leave behind the problem of a reader's mediation of the biblical text, but it is a problem that never left *him* behind, nor the Reformation as a whole, as it split into Lutheran, Reformed, and radical camps.

One figure during the early Reformation who highlighted this issue of the reader's role in the interpretive process was Erasmus of Rotterdam, a humanist scholar whose own sharp critique of the church, challenge to the Latin Vulgate with his Greek New Testament, and advocacy for lay access to Scripture earned him a reputation as having "laid the egg" which "Luther hatched."[15] Initially rather favorable towards Luther, Erasmus soon became alarmed by the reformer's rapidly deteriorating relationship with the Catholic hierarchy, and after seeking neutrality on Luther's conflict with the magisterium, Erasmus was eventually drawn into public dispute with him over the freedom of the will. In his 1524 treatise against Luther, Erasmus offers a Scriptural defense of the freedom of the will, but not before making a request in his introduction:

> Once the reader of my disputation recognizes that my fighting equipment is equal to that of the adversary, let him decide for himself, whether to attribute more to the decisions of all the many scholars, orthodox faithful, saints, martyr, theologians of ancient and recent times; of all the universities, as well as of the many councils, bishops and popes, or more to the private opinions of one or two men.[16]

Like Luther, Erasmus will make a biblical argument for his view, but here he addresses the practical problem of how to resolve disagreement when two learned exegetes using the same

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[14] Luther, "Letter of doctor Martin to the Christians of Antwerp," 547. See also Michelet Jules, *The Life of Martin Luther Gathered from His Own Writings*, 268.
[15] Arthur Robert Pennington, *The Life and Character of Erasmus,* 219.
[16] Desiderius Erasmus, "A Diatribe or Sermon Concerning Free Will," 13.

"fighting equipment" of reasoning through the Scriptures arrive at different but plausible conclusions. For Erasmus, asking his readers to weigh the decisions of saints, councils, and popes on the issue at hand does not mean he considers any of these as higher authorities than the Bible – as he soon says, "the sole authority of Holy Scripture surpasses the voices of all mortals" – but rather that they are of greater *interpretive* authority with respect to the Bible than Luther can claim for himself.[17] Erasmus thus clarifies: "we are not involved in a controversy regarding Scripture. The same Scripture is being loved and revered by both parties. Our battle concerns the sense of Scripture."[18] If Luther's belief in Scripture's clarity and certitude of his own reading veracity lead him to cast his exegetical opponents as repudiating the Word of God, Erasmus here attempts to uncouple what he considers Luther's unwarranted conflation of his interpretation and genuine biblical meaning. When viewed as the Bible against Erasmus, the terms of the debate clearly decry the latter, but by framing the controversy as one person's sense of the Word versus that of another, Erasmus levels the rhetorical playing field and discloses the element of human interpretation that is obscured under Luther's account of biblical hermeneutics.

By foregrounding Luther's status as a *reader* of Scripture, Erasmus puts him in perspective as one Bible reader among many, thereby opening up for critique Luther's interpretational certainty and belief in the clarity of Scripture, particularly as they relate to his denial of free will. "If it is really so clear," Erasmus asks, "why have all the excellent people here acted like blind men for so many centuries, especially in so important a matter as my opponents hold it to be?"[19] In what would remain a key component of Roman Catholic polemic throughout the Reformation, Erasmus argues that the institutional church represents a credible interpretive

[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid, 14.

community against which the individual must authenticate his religious views; indeed, he claims, even St. Paul had to verify with the early church "whether His manifestation really came from God."[20] In Erasmus's view, the Holy Spirit was ultimately more likely to be inspiring Christian tradition than radical innovation, a point he put frankly to Luther in Book I of his *Hyperaspistes*:

> We are dealing with this: would a stable mind depart from the opinion handed down by so many men famous for holiness and miracles, depart from the decision of the church, and commit our souls to the faith of someone like you who has sprung up just now with a few followers, although the leading men of your flock do not agree either with you or among themselves – indeed though you do not even agree with yourself, since in this same *Assertion* you say one thing in the beginning and something else later on, recanting what you said before.[21]

This passage's claim that a "stable mind" would not jettison the longstanding Christian belief in free will is revealing for how it presents a logic of societal *de*stabilization inherent in upending tradition and accepting Luther's view, as a consensus of "so many men famous for holiness and miracles" disintegrates into a factious group of devotees at odds with one another that has gathered around a single man who, Erasmus posits, is divided even against himself. More than this, the passage underscores Erasmus's belief that if he was to affirm his opponent's rejection of free will, he would not simply be entrusting himself to the Word, as Luther supposes, but would also be committing the care of his soul to *Luther* – that is, to *Luther's* words expounding *upon* the Word.

In his disputes with Luther and Tyndale, Thomas More likewise emphasized that the controversy was "not upon the scripture self, but upon the construction thereof" and expanded on Erasmus's defense of tradition by arguing that the meaning of Scripture is not fully available through just the words on the page, but that the Bible was written and exists in the context of a pre-textual, oral faith passed down from Christ to the Apostles and their successors which

[20] Ibid.
[21] Erasmus, *Hyperaspistes I*, 203.

discloses the biblical text's proper understanding.[22] To illustrate this point, More points out that although there are Scriptural passages that can be used to prove Christ's deity and equality with the Father, there are others that seem to represent him as less than the Father, such that a child who reads the Bible before receiving instruction in the church's Christology would likely adapt the Arian heresy:

> Whereas being previously taught, and having it confirmed by the faith of the Church, that our Savior is one God and one equal substance with his Father, he will well perceive and understand thereby that all the texts that seem to show him as less are to be understood as referring not at all to his divinity, but to his humanity only. Just as when we speak colloquially of ourselves and our own nature and say that we will die and worms eat us up, and turn us all into dust, we mean by all this our body only, and in no way intend thereby to deny the immortality of our soul.[23]

According to More, the Bible is but one half of divine revelation, the other being the oral Word of God preserved in the church's tradition.[24] For scriptural support of extra-biblical revelation, he cites John 21:25, in which the evangelist says there is much that Christ did which has not been put into writing, as well as Paul's directives and allusions to oral teachings.[25] Some examples of such teachings, More claims, include Mary's perpetual virginity, the mixing of water with wine in the liturgy, and the canon of Scripture itself.[26] Indeed, More notes that according to Saint

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[22] Thomas More, *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 160-65.
[23] Ibid, 165.
[24] Ibid, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 1:132-33; *Responsio ad Lutherum*, 1:243.
[25] Ibid, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 1:375. See also *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 175-76. For examples of biblical references to oral teachings, see 2 Thess. 2:15, 1 Cor. 11:34, 2 Tim. 2:2 (Geneva Bible).
[26] On the perpetual virginity of Mary, see *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 178-80; *Responsio ad Lutherum*, 1:103; *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 1:315. On the mixing of water with wine, see *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 176; *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 1:320. On the canon of Scripture, see *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 212; *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer*, 1:156.

Gregory Nazianzen, ancient heretics found the Scriptures so unclear about the Holy Spirit's divinity that "they called Him *theos agraptos*; that is, 'the God of whom nothing is written."[27]

More's confidence in the church's ability to discern the oral and written Word of God from the words of men is based on his reading of those biblical passages relating Christ's promise that the Holy Spirit would "lead" the church into all truth and empower it to remember everything Christ has told them – a more all-encompassing sort of divine guidance, More never tires of reminding his reader, than if the Spirit had been promised merely to write them all truth or communicate the truth orally.[28] In *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, More lays out the dramatic epistemological implications of this belief:

> . . . the church of Christ did not doubt that whatever the Holy Spirit inspired in the church was undoubtedly true, whether it was contained in scripture or not. Indeed, if any apparently contradictory scriptural text was alleged, the faith written in her heart taught that this text was insufficiently understood by those to whom it seemed so contradictory, since it was a matter of absolute certainty that Christ does not fail His church on articles of faith, nor does the truthful Spirit of God contradict Himself.[29]

More thus grants primacy to orality in his understanding of how God communicates His Word across history, whereas in the view of Luther and Tyndale, the only Word of God they could be certain of accessing during their time was the written letter. For More, there cannot be any conflict between the Church's articles of faith and the Scriptures because this would be to imply a contradiction between the oral and written Word, which is all *one* Word. As a result, any apparent discrepancy between the church's formulated doctrines and the Bible, no matter how evident it may seem to someone, is necessarily a false one – this is where the issue of faith becomes crucial – and it is the deviant exegete whose interpretation is ultimately askew. For the purposes of this study, we may call this act of faith in another living person *interpersonal faith*.

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[27] Ibid, *Responsio ad Lutherum*, 103.
[28] Ibid, *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 146-47, 208.
[29] Ibid, *Responsio ad Lutherum*, 103.

In this manner, More's faith in Christ translates into a trust in other people beginning with the disciples to whom Christ said "He that heareth you heareth me" and continuing up through their apostolic successors within the Catholic Church of More's own day.[30] I want to emphasize that this trust should not only include figures from the past, but that it must extend up to *living* people. Written texts must be interpreted, but those texts can be misread in a way that serves our own purposes, and they cannot speak for themselves when their meaning is in dispute. As a result, readers with conflicting interpretations can all claim to be in communion with the written text and the person whose voice it represents. A living person's words must also be interpreted, but unlike a book, we can ask that person clarifying questions about what he means, and we can stand to be corrected by that person himself in the event that we have misunderstood him.

If for More the church is a visible society led by the Spirit in its collective discernment of the biblical canon and authoritative exegesis of Scripture, in Luther's view, no visible church possesses any divine guarantee that it will interpret the Bible faithfully, nor does any particular person. As he says in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, "the Word of God is incomparably superior to the church, and in this Word the church, being a creature, has nothing to decree, ordain, or make, but only to be decreed, ordained, and made."[31] For Luther, Christ's promise that the Spirit will lead the church without error belongs solely to those Christians among whom "the pure gospel is preached".[32] Read in this way, the promise of divine guidance does not mean that certain identifiable people will collectively persist in teaching the pure gospel, but rather that the authentic gospel will always be held by *someone*. More and Luther's

[30] More, *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, 194.
[31] Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, 238.
[32] Ibid. See also Luther's "That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture," 305.

approaches to the Church and the Bible are ultimately the inverse of one another, and can be stated thus: for More, the prospective Christian should use the Bible (not yet considering it divinely inspired), patristic documents, and the historical record to track the succession of ministerial office from the original apostles to their present-day occupants and then learn about the inspired biblical canon and what the gospel entails from those living persons, conforming his mind to theirs. For Luther, however, a person should first read the Bible (using tradition as an interpretive aid, but not a final authority) to discover the gospel, and then seek out those people who hold that gospel, whom he has defined as the church.

The difference between using apostolic succession or *sola Scriptura* as a method for finding the church cannot be understated and goes to the heart of the issue of hermeneutical authority. For while each method begins with a person using his private judgment in search of the church, the apostolic succession paradigm demands that this person eventually relinquish his interpretive authority to the bishops, who he identifies as divinely authorized to discern the canonical Scriptures, interpret the Bible, and bind his conscience. In contrast, the *sola scriptura* paradigm expressly denies that any particular person or creed possesses such divine authority, because this would mean putting the words of men above the Word of God. Recall that for Luther, the Bible is perspicuous and carries its own hermeneutic authority to interpret itself. Consequently, on a practical level, *sola Scriptura* functions in the following way: the individual Christian reads the Bible and comes to his own understanding of what "the gospel" means (again, using tradition as an aid, but judging for himself when tradition is and is not in accord with Scripture), defines as "the church" those whom he believes sufficiently share his concept of "the gospel", and seeks them out. Should this Christian change what *he* understands "the gospel" to mean, or if those persons whom he has previously considered “the church” should, in his eyes,

change *their* conception of the gospel, then he begins the process anew and seeks "the church" elsewhere. To be sure, Luther would have been horrified at the idea that a Christian should determine his "own understanding" of the gospel, as I have phrased it, but this is because Luther assumed that his particular conception of the gospel was the one any fair-minded and informed reader would discover in the Scriptures. Luther may not have anticipated that Christians would arrive at interpretations of the gospel different from his own, but that they had a right to do so according to the reformer's own stated principles as well as a duty to stand by their exegetical conclusions in imitation of Luther's own stand at Worms is incontrovertible.

Just as Luther's conflict with the Catholic hierarchy represents an interpretive crisis unfolding on the level of the individual Christian, one of the German reformer's most high-profile critics, Henry VIII, became embroiled in a conflict with Rome that would see the hermeneutical crisis playing out on the level of the national sovereign. The circumstances surrounding the king's "great matter" are well-known, of course, and have become an integral part of England's national mythology: desperate for a male heir and convinced that his marriage to Catherine of Aragon violated Leviticus 20:21, Henry unsuccessfully sought an annulment from Pope Clement VII, who, in addition to theological reasons, also had political motives for refusing the annulment, since at that time Clement was practically the prisoner of Catherine's nephew, Charles V. Undeterred, Henry married Anne Boleyn without papal sanction, and subsequently had this marriage proclaimed valid and his previous one declared invalid by Archbishop Cranmer. In 1534, Parliament passed the Act of Supremacy, which identified Henry as "the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England" and also asserted that this title

belongs to all future English monarchs.[33] Significantly, the Act of Supremacy's wording implied that parliament was not allocating to Henry new authority as supreme head, but was recognizing a power that English monarchs always possessed. In doing so, the act was following the lead of the 1533 Act of Appeals, which identified England as an empire that was not subject to any foreign power, as well as the *Collectanea satis copiosa*, an assortment of historical, patristic, and scriptural texts that Henry's governmental and clerical agents presented to him in order to argue for the English king and realm's independence from Rome.[34] By the end of 1534, the merging of church and state was complete, and parliament declared it treason to deny the king his title of supreme head or call him a "heretic, schismatic, tyrant, infidel or usurper of the crown".[35]

Despite the stark theological differences and polemical enmity between Luther and Henry VIII, there are significant parallels between the two and their religious situations which can further illuminate the interplay between the individual and community as it pertains to the reformation's interpretive crisis. First, each man's break with the papacy included his assertion of religious interpretive autonomy against Western Christianity's conventional ecclesial authority at that time, the Roman Catholic Church. As we saw, Luther argued that due to his membership in a priesthood of all believers, he and all other Christians have the right and duty to judge doctrine themselves, apart from any religious institution. Although Henry recoiled at the notion that every Christian possesses such freedom, he asserted his own prerogative to judge orthodoxy and heterodoxy by virtue of his divinely endowed "imperial crown" whose power is

[33] Henry VIII, "An Act concerning the King's Highness to be Supreme Head of the Church of England . . .," 364.
[34] On the 1533 Act of Appeals, see Henry VIII, "An Act that the appeals in such cases . . .," 353; on the *Collectanea satis copiosa*, see Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations*, 102.
[35] Henry VIII, "An Act whereby divers offences . . .," 63.

"without restraint or provocation to any foreign princes or potentates of the world".[36] Implicit in this claim is that other monarchs have the same "whole and entire power, preeminence, authority, prerogative and jurisdiction" in their own respective realms that Henry was claiming for himself within England.[37] Henry thus mirrors Luther's assertion of interpretive empowerment against Papal and Roman Catholic claims to universal religious authority, only rather than professing it in the name of the individual Christian, Henry does so on behalf of the individual sovereign. When we consider the emerging Tudor nation-state as embodied in the monarch, we can say that the freedom Luther championed for individual Christian bodies, Henry advanced for national ones. Further, in order to resist the supranational power which Rome had been exercising in England and was still exerting throughout Western Christendom, the Henrician regime located its ecclesial identity in a community of British Christians existing prior to the Gregorian mission and Romanization of the English Church, and who only came under the spell of the pope thereafter:

> Whereby he did not only rob the King's Majesty, being only the supreme head of this his realm of England immediately under God, of his honour, right and preeminence due unto him by the law of God, but spoiled this his realm yearly of innumerable treasure, and with the loss of the same deceived the King's loving and obedient subjects, persuading to them, by his laws, bulls and other his deceivable means, such dreams, vanities and fantasies as by the same many of them were seduced and conveyed unto superstitious and erroneous opinions; so that the King's Majesty, the Lords spiritual and temporal, and the Commons in this realm, being overwearied and fatigated with the experience of the infinite abominations and mischiefs proceeding of his impostures and craftily colouring of his deceits, to the great damages of souls, bodies and good, were forced of necessity for the public weal of this realm to exclude that foreign pretended power, jurisdiction and authority, used and usurped within this realm . . .[38]

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[36] Henry VIII, "An Act that the appeals in such cases . . .," 353.
[37] Ibid. This is a point that is later made clear in the 1536 "Act extinguishing the authority of the bishop of Rome" in which parliament says that the bishop of Rome has excluded "all other temporal kings and princes out of their dominions which they ought to have by God's law upon the bodies and goods of their subjects" (Henry VIII, 365).
[38] Ibid, "Act extinguishing the authority of the bishop of Rome," 365-66.

Like Luther's *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, the 1536 parliamentary act "extinguishing the authority of the bishop of Rome" paints a picture of mass deception and papal exploitation, except rather than an obscure monk articulating the message, government power is the one making the declaration here, as king and parliament shrug off the longstanding Roman influence upon England. Already separated from the rest of Christendom by geography and culture, Henry's assertion of royal supremacy now placed England in spiritual isolation as well, which is a point that Jeffrey Knapp develops in *Shakespeare's Tribe*.[39] Discussing what he calls England's "rogue nationalism", Knapp observes how apologists for the royal supremacy countered the charge that England had broken with Europe's Christian countries: "England, they argued, only *appeared* to have separated itself from Christendom, when in fact it had successfully rejoined the 'invisible' church from which the English had long been 'wanderers, walking astray,' while 'under the tuition of romish pastors."[40] Here again the pattern of Luther's conflict with the Catholic hierarchy would play out, only on a national level. Just as Luther's break with the Western Church positioned him as a minority against a majority, so too Henry's schism from Rome set England apart from the society of Western Christendom, and in both cases, the assertion of autonomy included profession of membership in an invisible church over and against the ecclesial body from which they had dissented.

Following the Protestant reforms of Edward VI and the Catholic counter-reforms implemented by Mary Tudor, Elizabeth's reign saw the reinstatement of the Act of Supremacy in 1558, which, along with the Act of Uniformity, the Book of Common Prayer, and the Thirty-Nine Articles, would come to define state religion in Shakespeare's England. Under Elizabeth, the English Church maintained a Trinitarian Christology and retained an episcopal structure

[39] Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe,* 61-62.
[40] Ibid, 62.

along with various traditional elements, while also adopting numerous protestant positions such as *sola fide*, *sola Scriptura*, and a rejection of purgatory. This "Elizabethan Settlement", as it would later be called, was designed to secure a broad consensus among English Christians and avert the sort of bloodshed occurring on the continent, and insofar as England avoided mass religious violence over the latter half of the sixteenth-century, one can credit it with some degree of success. As recent historians have emphasized, however, the queen's reign was fraught with religious turmoil and persecution, leaving the Elizabethan Settlement conspicuous for just how much it left *un*settled. Discontent with the settlement was most pronounced among "papists" who desired the English Church's return to traditional religion, if not to Roman jurisdiction, and "puritans" who found the church insufficiently reformed. Recusants and conformists could be found among both of these camps, and notwithstanding the manifold religious discrepancies between "papistry" and "puritanism", apologists for the *status quo* of the religious settlement frequently equated the two as schismatic and sectarian. Richard Bancroft, for example, characterized these groups as extremes that faithful English Christians must avoid:

> Some forbid the children of GOD to proove any thing. Others command them to be ever seeking and prooving of all things. But neither of them both in a right good sense, do deale therein as they ought to do. A meane course betwixt these two is to be allowed of and followed: which is, that we proove some things, and that we receive without curiositie some other things alreadie examined, prooved and tried to our hands.[41]

Bancroft's remarks indicate how unresolved problems of interpretive authority concerning *sola Scriptura*, apostolic succession, and ecclesiastical jurisdiction underlay the established church's conflicts with its religious opponents. Between Rome's universal claim as supreme interpretive judge of the Scriptures and every person engaging in his own wholesale reformation of the church, Bancroft seeks some balance between deference to established authority and Scriptural

[41] Richard Bancroft, *A sermon preached at Paules Crosse,* 33.

trial of received religion. For Bancroft, as for other defenders of the religious compromise, the Thirty-Nine Articles encapsulate just such a balance in their affirmation of early Catholic creeds alongside select Protestant tenets.

Nonetheless, a tension exists between the Established Church's commitment to *sola Scriptura* and its maintenance of episcopal polity, and it is a strain that would drive the English "Puritan" controversy through the turn of the seventeenth-century.[42] This tension is palpable in Bancroft's admonition that English Christians should "proove some things" but "receive without curiositie some other things alreadie examined, prooved and tried to our hands."[43] To whom is Bancroft referring when he says "our hands"? Certainly not disgruntled "papists" or "puritans", both of whom found the Elizabethan Church inconsistent with their own approaches to the Bible and balked at the idea that their faith contradicts the Scriptures. To be sure, Bancroft is not

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[42] The strain between *sola Scriptura* and episcopacy is crystallized in the Thirty-Nine Articles' statement on the authority of the church: The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and authoritie in controuersies of faith: And yet it is not lawfull for the Church to ordaine any thing that is contrary to Gods word written, neither may it so expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. Wherfore, although the Church bee a witnesse and a keeper of holy writ: yet as it ought not to decree any thing against the same, so besides the same, ought it not to enforce any thing to be beleeued for necessitie of saluation" (B2). The question which naturally arises from this statement is how someone determines if the Church is decreeing or enforcing something contrary to the Scriptures? Does a Christian use his own discernment, or instead turn to the Church for arbitration, when it is that very Church's judgment that is in dispute and, by its own admission, may be wrong? The subsequent article on the authority of general councils amplifies this problem, declaring that general councils "may erre, and sometime haue erred, euen in things pertayning vnto God," and thus "things ordeined by them as necessary to saluation, haue neither strength nor authoritie, vnlesse it may be declared that they be taken out of holy Scripture" (B2). Given these qualifications, the position of the Elizabethan Church can be understood thus: inasmuch as the Established Church claims to base its beliefs on the Bible, it subscribes to *sola Scriptura*. Having found its doctrines confirmed by the Scriptures, the Church naturally considers its articles of faith as true. However, because the Church is prone to error and remains subject to the Bible, it considers itself continually open to reformation according to the Scriptures. As Bancroft says, though, such judgment must be authorized and enacted by the Church hierarchy itself and the crown, since "if authoritie and libertie of judging shall be left to private men, there will never be anie certaintie set downe, but rather all religion will wholie become doubtfull" (46).

[43] Bancroft, 46.

claiming that the Church's articles of faith are exempt from being "examined, prooved and tried" by the Scriptures; rather, he is stating that they have "alreadie" been tested against the Bible by the English monarch, episcopacy, and convocation. Although he casts submission to the English episcopacy as a kind of moderate trust in a hermeneutic authority, what Bancroft's admonition amounts to is a justification for the Church of England's dissent from Rome while establishing its own unique boundaries for biblical interpretation and discernment of essential religious matters from *adiaphora*. This is a point that was not lost on radical Puritans like John Penry, who found echoes of papistry in Bancroft's call for submission to the English episcopacy:

> You account the Papifts to be falfe Prophets, becaufe they will fuffer the people to trie nothing, but teach them wholly to depend vppon them: you do wel in it. But if this touching coucels, be not to ioin hand with them, in the point wherin you pretend to bee their aduerfary, & if this be not to teach men to beleeve, as their mother the church doth, let the reader judge. The Bishop of Rome, defireth no more to bee graunted vnto him, for the authoritie of his councels, the you haue fet down in expreffe terms.[44]

By Penry's estimate, the Elizabethan Church should be commended for its dissent from the pope, but if the English episcopacy is then going to demand subscription of its ministers and conformity of the laity to unbiblical teachings of its own, then it is no better than Rome. Like Milton in the following century, Penry does not locate the essence of papistry in beliefs such as transubstantiation or purgatory, both of which are rejected in the Thirty-Nine Articles, but instead, he finds it in any church's call for conformity to unbiblical teachings. Penry's assertion that the pope and english episcopacy are making equal claims to authority is only half true, however, as the rest of his complaint against Bancroft bears out:

> And if the Lorde hath bound himfelfe by his promife vnto his Church of purpofe, that men fhould be directed therby: I would demaunt of you, whether this promife was, that the Church fhould direct them vnto truth, or vnto errour. If you fay vnto truth, otherwife it were no promife, I demand then how the Church can erre? For either the Lord muft breake his promife, if hee hath made any, or els the Church cannot erre in the direction of

[44] John Penry, "A briefe discouery," 35.

> her dutifull children. Now if you fay, that the Church cannot erre, the reader knoweth what account to make of you, if she be fubiect vnto errors, to what end fhould we ftand to her determination in matters of queftion, any further than we are affured, that her decrees are according vnto the word. Now, if it be lawfull for vs (otherwife our bondage fhould bee intollerable) to trie whether her determinations bee according vnto the word, and to reiect them, if they bee otherwife, to what ende doe you carry vs from the fure foundacion of the worde, vnto the vncertaine and vnconftant voice of the Church?[45]

Whereas Rome would claim that the holy spirit protects its general councils from ever binding Christians unto falsehood, Penry points out that the English Church qualifies its own articles of faith by affirming that councils may err. Penry capitalizes on this admission by asking why English Christians should conform to the episcopal hierarchy and its doctrines when that same institution declares it has made mistakes in the past and remains liable to them now? Indeed, how can it be said that the church is led by the spirit, which is truth itself, if the church can err? Of course, by posing these kinds of questions to Bancroft, Penry's point is not that he would conform to the Established Church if it was to suddenly claim infallibility for itself in decreeing its articles of faith. At that moment, Penry would surely employ the Protestant critique against Rome and accuse the English Church of setting the words of men on the same level as the Word of God. Rather, Penry is setting a trap for his opponent: if Bancroft should claim that the Established Church is led by the spirit into truth, then he would be contradicting the twenty-first statement in the Thirty-Nine Articles and embracing the crowning principle of papistry in the eyes of his Protestant readers ("the reader knoweth what account to make of you"). Without the Established Church making that claim to teach without the possibility of error, Penry can ask how confident he can be in the hierarchy's articles if it has been wrong before while also forcefully questioning why he should submit to a self-admittedly fallible church rather than an infallible Bible. The problem Bancroft faces with Penry here is the same issue that other versions

[45] Ibid, 34-35.

of state-mandated Protestantism had to deal with in trying to claim authority over religious doctrine and worship while at the same time trying to distinguish themselves from Rome, particularly in its claim to infallibility.

Although Papists and Puritans both harbored optimism that James would favor their causes upon his accession to the English throne, his reign saw a deepening of the hermeneutical crisis on both of these fronts. Not only did the 1603 Hampton Court Conference re-assert the *status quo* within the Established Church to the disappointment of English Puritans, but in its aftermath, James pursued a revitalized enforcement of ministerial conformity, resulting in the disciplining of dozens of clerics and increased Puritan resentment. James' past disquieting experiences with Scottish Presbyterians combined with the godly's republican ideals for church and state convinced the king that Puritanism posed a threat to his authority and civil order. James' own absolutist view of the "divine right of kings", which set the monarch above the law and made him accountable only to God, further intensified the antagonism between the two parties, as James frequently eschewed the heavily Puritan-influenced parliament and opted instead to govern alone. James' continual toleration of Catholics in his court only added to Puritan fears that he was planning a Popish agenda, but to the end of his reign, the king remained steadfastly reformed, despite repeated efforts to convert him to Rome. Following the 1605 Gunpowder Plot and James' imposition of the oath of allegiance, however, a renewed urgency was brought to earlier Tudor problems concerning Catholic loyalty and papal claims to religio-political authority in England. Although James insisted on his oath's difference from Henry's oath of supremacy by arguing that the oath only touched on temporal issues, its designation of various propositions as "heretical" inevitably encroached on Rome's religious authority in the eyes of many English Catholics, and as Karen Sawyer Marsalek observes, "the divisions between

those who swore the oath and those who refused it did not fall neatly along the lines of 'civilly obedient' church papists and 'perverse' regicidal radicals that James had framed."[46] Indeed, Michael Questier argues that the "subtle genius of the oath was that it was calculated to erode and dissolve the boundaries that gave some form and resilience to English Romanist dissent in the absence of the normal ecclesiastical structures."[47]

Early in his reign as king of England, James expressed on several occasions his desire to see Christendom reunited in one faith, and proposed that the papacy call a general council of Catholics and Protestants alike to settle the religious controversies. We know from a letter detailing Rome's response that Pope Clement VIII viewed the Council of Trent and other past councils as having already validated Rome's position on these matters, and that many kings and emperors had submitted to them. Like James, Henry IV of France had also wanted a council convened to settle religious controversy, Clement pointed out, but the king eventually converted without one. Hoping that the English king would follow Henry's example, Clement emphasized that faith is a gift and assured James of his prayers. At the end of Shakespeare's life in 1616, neither James nor the papacy had received their wish, however, and instead of unity, Western Christianity was trending towards further dissolution. Eight years following Shakespeare's death, that fragmentation would be explicitly referenced on the Jacobean stage in Philip Massinger's 1624 play *The Renegado*. During the play's opening scene, the Venetian gentleman Vitelli asks his servant Gazet what his religion is, and in reply, Gazet expresses his frustration toward the divisions within Christianity: "When all your sects and sectaries are grown of one opinion, if I like it I will profess myself – in the mean time, live I in England, Spain, France, Rome, Geneva:

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[46] Karen Sawyer Marsalek, "Staging Allegiance, Re-membering Trials: *King Henry VIII* and the Blackfriars Theater," 135.
[47] M.C. Questier. "Loyalty, Religion and State Power in Early Modern England: English Romanism and the Jacobean Oath of Allegiance," 320.

I'm of that country's faith" (1.1.33-37).[48] Although Gazet's practice of adopting the dominant religion of whatever country he happens to reside in is a form of practical expediency consistent with his worldly ethos, his stipulation that he will not consider committing to any particular faith until Christians are of one mind speaks to the scandal that ecclesial disunity posed in the early seventeenth-century.

In this study, I will argue that several of Shakespeare's plays demonstrate a deep unease towards the religious and societal fragmentation that resulted from this crisis of hermeneutical authority, and that the dramatist imagines literary solutions to this problem in his work. As critics such as Annabel Patterson, Richard Dutton and Gerald Pinciss have shown, early modern playwrights enjoyed a surprising degree of freedom to engage with the religious issues of their day despite state censorship, and far from being expunged of doctrinal content, the stage was a site of lively theological expression.[49] Since drama traditionally involves conflict, devotional controversy was a natural wellspring from which playwrights could draw to shape their work, not to mention one that was deeply relevant to their audience. Any study of damnation in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* now seems incomplete without considering sixteenth-century contentions over Calvinist predestination, for example; nor can we hardly discuss the ghost in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* without reference to the reformation dispute over purgatory; and an informed reading of Middleton's blockbuster *A Game at Chess* requires at least some knowledge of the anti-Catholic politics current in 1624 England.

In exploring how Shakespearean drama addresses the issue of hermeneutic authority and exegetical pluralism, this dissertation expands current discussions within the "religious turn" of

[48] Philip Massinger, *The Renegado*.
[49] Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation*; Richard Dutton, *Licensing, Censorship, and Authorship in Early Modern England*; G.M. Princiss, *Forbidden Matter*.

literary studies, which is concerned with how early modern texts represent contemporary theological, liturgical, and devotional issues. In contrast to new historicist and cultural materialist approaches, the "turn to religion" in early modern studies pushes us to take the period's religious convictions seriously and on their own terms rather than approaching them as a spiritual "master code" that should be demystified in order to uncover a materialist core of economic, political, and social conditions.[50] Debora Shuger has proven especially influential in asserting the centrality of religious belief for this period and challenging the myopic presentism of scholarship that treats early modern religious discourse as little more than a cover for the oppressive exercise of power.[51] As Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti state regarding the limitations of new historicism and cultural materialism, "While this approach to religion has produced some astute political criticism in recent years, it has, with regard to religion, distorted our sense of the large and alien cultural landscape of early modern England."[52] Intertwined with this self-critical move among literary scholars to acknowledge and respect the "otherness" of early modern religious culture has been a reassessment of the Whig narrative of England's religious history which portrayed the English Reformation as grassroots in nature and the laity as broadly disdainful towards an ossified late-medieval Church. Through their meticulous investigation of parish records and pamphlet literature, historians such as Eamon Duffy, John Bossy, and Christopher Haigh have discredited this view in favor of one that not only is more conscious of English Catholicism's devotional vibrancy and continued popularity during the sixteenth-century, but which also

[50] Fredric Jameson, "Religion and Ideology: A Political Reading of Paradise Lost," 40.
[51] Debora Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance;* Shuger, *Sacred Rhetoric:* Shuger, *The Renaissance Bible*; Shuger, *Political Theologies in Shakespeare's England*.
[52] Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, "The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies," 168.

acknowledges the Reformation as a protracted, unsteady process.[53] Post-revisionists like Ethan Shagan, Christopher Marsh, and Norman Jones have since refined and further complicated this perspective, focusing on the instability of religious boundaries and confessional identities in this period on account of the faithful's varying degrees of resistance against religious change.[54]

Shakespeare studies have occupied a special role within the "religious turn", partly due to the dramatist's stature within the western canon, but also because his life and works intersect in such an intriguing way with its renewed interest in English Catholicism and the complexities of early modern religious experience. Critical reappraisal of biographical details in Shakespeare's background indicating Catholic loyalties among his family and the playwright's possible ties to recusant circles has rejuvenated speculation about the playwright's own attitude towards contemporary religious controversy and fueled fresh readings of his drama. On the one hand, Clare Asquith and Peter Milward are representative of a vein of scholarship that adamantly argues on behalf of a Catholic Shakespeare whose works are permeated with the traditional religion of his upbringing and an affinity for the recusant community.[55] Richard Wilson also ascribes a crypto-Catholic identity to Shakespeare, albeit one who adopted a "politique" neutrality towards religious controversy, and reads the plays as veiled allegories eschewing Jesuit militancy as much as state persecution.[56] Other critics emphasize various Catholic

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[53] Seminal texts of the post-revisionist account include Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*; John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850*; J.J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*.
[54] Ethan Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*; Christopher Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England: Holding Their Peace*; Norman Jones, *The English Reformation: Religion and Cultural Adaptation.*
[55] Clare Asquith, *Shadowplay: The Hidden Beliefs and Coded Politics of William Shakespeare*; Peter Milward, *Shakespeare the Papist*. See also Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *Shakespeare, Catholicism, and Romance*; David N. Beauregard, *Catholic Theology in Shakespeare's Plays*; Joseph Pearce, *The Quest for Shakespeare*.
[56] Richard Wilson, *Secret Shakespeare: Studies in Theatre, Religion and Resistance.*

sensibilities or influences in Shakespeare's work, but are less sweeping in their judgments about his personal faith. John Klause, for instance, has demonstrated that Shakespeare drew extensively from the works of Robert Southwell, while Thomas Rist has argued that *Titus Andronicus* and *Hamlet* evince a Catholic valuation of the performativity of mourning.[57] Still others view Shakespeare as adopting a mix of Catholic and Protestant positions in his drama. Maurice Hunt, for instance, argues for a "syncretic" Shakespeare, whereas Jean-Christophe Mayer perceives the drama as "hybrid", possessing a patchwork quality indicative of a dramatist who is seriously seeking answers to the theological controversies of his age.[58]

One of the central concerns among Shakespearean critics writing within the "religious turn" has been understanding the drama's relationship to the fragmentation and formation of community in the wake of the Reformation. Sarah Beckwith, for example, has demonstrated how Shakespeare's Romances generate interpersonal modes of forgiveness in response to the displacement of sacramental reconciliation, while Jeffrey Knapp has argued that Shakespeare, Jonson and several other English dramatists reacted to the religious conflicts of their time by using the theater to promote a supranational, "Erasmian" form of Christianity characterized by "inclusivism" and "doctrinal minimalism."[59] Phebe Jensen, too, explores the intersection between theater, religion and community in her argument that Shakespeare aligns his drama with communal festive practices associated with traditional religion. Although these studies offer unique insights into how early modern English plays posit different modes of community to fill societal ruptures left by post-Reformation fragmentation of Christian belief, *Scripture, Sects and*

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[57] John Klause, *Shakespeare, the Earl, and the Jesuit*; Thomas Rist, *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England*.
[58] Maurice Hunt, *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness*; Jean-Christophe Mayer, *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith.*
[59] Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*; Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare's Tribe*.

Shakespeare explores how Renaissance drama imagines resolutions to religious division by addressing the Reformation conflict over interpretive authority. As Susan Schreiner has recently reminded us, the question of whether the Spirit spoke primarily through communal and institutional interpretive structures or through the individual's experience with the Scriptural text was a key issue upon which religious disputes were predicated in this period, since with each new schism the hermeneutical autonomy of the individual or dissenting body was privileged over the larger community's.

Nowhere in this dissertation do I make any claim regarding Shakespeare's overall religious identity. In lieu of any definitive biographical evidence on this issue, I am convinced that Arthur Marotti's caution remains perennially valid when he states that "any discussion of religion and Shakespeare is an overdetermined one."[60] Nonetheless, what I do claim in this study is that in several of Shakespeare's works, the playwright intuits Christendom's religious fragmentation as a profound breakdown of interpersonal trust that came with the pervasive practice of *sola Scriptura* among Christians. The four plays I focus on are not just ones in which Shakespeare is engaging with religious questions, but works whose religious discourse is interwoven with issues of interpretation that are at the core of the plot. In chapter one, I begin by arguing that *Twelfth Night* dramatizes the struggle between internal and external modes of interpretive authority as that conflict was represented in the anti-Puritan discourse of English conformist writers. Whereas influential defenders of the Established Church such as Richard Bancroft and Richard Hooker founded their own authority for biblical interpretation in a shared history of oral understanding and a belief in the spirit's abiding presence in the episcopacy's communal decisions, they cast "Puritan" exegetical authority as grounded in individualist claims

[60] Arthur Marotti, "Shakespeare and Catholicism," 218.

of exegetical expertise and personal experience of the spirit. Reading *Twelfth Night* against this religious backdrop, I argue that in contrast to Malvolio, who prefers a private paradigm of interpretation that leads him into error, Viola proves to be the play's more perceptive reader by looking to the oral testimony of others for verification of her own hopes. Shakespeare, I claim, shapes *Twelfth Night*'s comic resolution by means of a communal hermeneutic espousing attributes of humility, shared memory, and self-sacrifice that conformist writers were calling their "Puritan" opponents to embrace if they are to read the Scriptures rightly.

If *Twelfth Night* presents interpretive authority as deriving from an insider's knowledge of a specific community's living tradition, *Hamlet* explores the religious, philosophical, and political problems that arose within England as a result of replacing one hermeneutical authority figure with another. In my second chapter, I show how the epistemological crisis Hamlet experiences in reaction to Gertrude's remarriage and Claudius' replacement of Old Hamlet as the prince's father reflect concerns about devotional fluctuation that Catholics expressed towards reform of the English Church and the assertion of royal supremacy. I further argue that in its depiction of the political threat which Hamlet's ideals pose to Denmark's new *status quo*, the play casts a tragic light on the conflict between disaffected Catholics and the Protestant state. The "death of fathers" is a common part of life, Claudius tells the disconsolate prince, and yet what *Hamlet* shows us are the calamitous and decidedly *un*common effects that the papal father's extirpation from England would have on relations between English Catholics and their own government.

Earlier I explained how apostolic succession and *sola Scriptura* represented two different approaches to identifying the church at the onset of the reformation, the first *other-oriented* in the believer's entrustment of hermeneutic authority to another living person (an act which I have

called *interpersonal faith*) and the second *self-oriented* in the believer's placing faith in his own interpretive judgment. The third chapter examines how *Othello* dramatizes the value of ecclesial faith and the limitations of *sola Scriptura* for sustaining Christian community. Reading Desdemona as figurative for the church, I argue that Othello's tragic mistake lies in his failure to develop a belief in the *troth* Desdemona pledged upon marrying him – put in religious terms, he does not make an act of interpersonal faith in her fidelity. Although Othello's own judgment and reasoning prove sufficient in explaining Desdemona's love for him to the Venetian senate and satisfy Othello himself through the play's first two acts, they fail to withstand the challenge posed by Iago, whose hermeneutic of suspicion towards Desdemona resonates with the protestant critique of the Roman Church as the unfaithful "whore of Babylon". What Iago exposes and takes advantage of is how Othello affirms his wife's faithfulness only insofar as he can verify it for himself. The play positions Othello in such a way, I maintain, that if he held an interpersonal faith in Desdemona's faithfulness, his reason and imagination would be anchored in that direction as well, stimulating him to generate possibilities for how the words, behavior, and evidence presented to him can be reconciled with his wife's fidelity.

In my final chapter, I examine how *The Winter's Tale* continues *Othello*'s painful meditation on private judgment's destructive consequences for Christian community, but as a tragicomic work, the play also dramatizes the transformative, and indeed, restorative effects of interpersonal faith upon broken communion. Placing his trust in Desdemona may be the obvious, even trite, solution to Othello's crisis, but in *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare shows us that the simplicity of such an act of faith is matched only by its profundity. In my final chapter, I argue that *The Winter's Tale* imbues the exercise of interpersonal faith with a sense of the miraculous in its act of self-surrender and ability to radically transform one's own perception of the world.

While criticism has typically focused on Hermione's "resurrection" as *The Winter's Tale*'s most important exploration of the miraculous, my claim is that this *seeming* conversion of stone into flesh at the play's end signifies a more authentic miracle, which is the changing of Leontes' hardened mind.

Chapter 1:

"Thy Speech Serves for Authority": From Personal Fantasy to Personal Encounter in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*

At the end of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, an irate Malvolio confronts Olivia with the letter that has made a fool of him – a letter that, on its face, bears the markings of Olivia's authorship. Defying her to produce writing with a style of "hand or phrase" (5.1.326) different from the letter's own, he is shocked to learn that it was actually written by Maria. Moreover, while Malvolio interpreted the letter as if it meant to exalt him, he discovers that it was designed to do the opposite. For Maria, Fabian, Sir Toby, Feste, and Sir Andrew, the letter was not meant to praise Malvolio, but to mock him. Malvolio's excessive self-regard, which has limited his participation in the social communion of Olivia's household, has blinded him from recognizing the letter's satirical quality. Unlike the self-isolating egocentrism that drives Malvolio into disastrous error, Viola's self-effacing humility and verification of her hopes against the oral testimony of others leads her to attain her deepest desires in this play. As I will show, Malvolio and Viola's contrasting approaches to the world dramatize a struggle between internal and external modes of interpretive authority as that conflict was represented in the anti-Puritan discourse of Shakespeare's day. In this chapter, I contend that the playwright shapes *Twelfth Night*'s comic resolution by means of a communal hermeneutic espousing attributes of humility, shared memory, and self-sacrifice that conformist writers were calling their opponents to embrace if they are to read the Scriptures rightly.

In studying Malvolio's interaction with the band of revelers in *Twelfth Night*, numerous critics have argued that early modern theatergoers would have recognized contemporary religious elements in the play. Among scholars who draw connections between *Twelfth Night*

and early modern religion,[1] J.L. Simmons's classic study argues that Malvolio's egotistical interpretation is consistent with the Established Church's stereotype of "Puritans" as sectarians engaging in self-serving biblical exegesis, while James Forrest associates Malvolio's "singularity" (2.5.148) with religious dissent.[2] Recently, Maurice Hunt has posited that in "portraying Puritanical Malvolio's notion of Providence as self-serving, Shakespeare satirizes his character's belief in the unmediated, unearned, material blessing of the elect."[3] Frequently, this scholarship highlighting Puritan elements in Malvolio converges with criticism exploring saturnalian and carnivalesque forms of misrule, festivity, and a subsequent return to order in *Twelfth Night,* whereby Malvolio serves as a somber censor turned comic butt.[4] Phebe Jensen has lately revisited this subject from the vantage point of religious controversy and the association of traditional pastimes with Catholic religion.[5] For Jensen, *Twelfth Night* expresses nostalgia for a past in which church ales, licensed misrule, and ginger that is "hot i'th' mouth" (2.3.114-15)

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[1] On *Twelfth Night*'s relationship to the Christian liturgical year, see R. Chris Hassel, Jr., *Renaissance Drama and the English Church Year*, 77-89, 94-101 and *Faith and Folly in Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies*, 149-75. Maurice Hunt demonstrates how the play offers a comic staging of the annunciation in "*Twelfth Night* and the Annunciation." On the play's associations with Catholic recusant elements in English country houses, see Anne Lecercle, "Country house, Catholicity and the crypt(ic)." On the play's allusion to the doctrine of transubstantiation, see Dean Paul, "The Harrowing of Malvolio." For a reading of the play's engagement with the East, Islam, and border zone politics, see Su Fang Ng, "Frontiers of *Twelfth Night*."

[2] J.L. Simmons, "Source for Shakespeare's Malvolio," 182; James F. Forrest, "Malvolio and Puritan 'Singularity'." Additional studies on Malvolio and Puritanism include Marianne Novy, *Shakespeare and Outsiders;* Donna Hamilton, *Shakespeare and the Politics of Protestant England*; J.J.M. Tobin, "Gabriel Harvey in Illyria"; Paul N. Siegel, "Malvolio: Comic Puritan Automaton." Although it has become a critical commonplace to side with Sir Toby and judge Malvolio as an anti-mirth figure who would stamp out festivity altogether, Brian Walsh has challenged this view in *Unsettled Toleration*, arguing that Malvolio does not oppose cakes, ale, and singing *per* se, but objects to their indulgence in an inappropriate place and time (100-103).

[3] Hunt, *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness*, 75.

[4] See C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*; Francois Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World*; Michael D. Bristol, *Carnival and Theater*.

[5] Phebe Jensen, *Religion and Revelry.*

carried spiritual value owing to their enjoyment within a sacramental worldview, before traditional revelry was forced to undergo its own Reformation in early modern England.

As we consider Malvolio, we must remember that unlike Zeal-of-the-Land Busy in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, Malvolio is not a Puritan character, and aside from his rejection of the Pythagorean transmigration of souls (4.2.54-55), he does not profess any religious belief. Maria merely says that "sometimes he is a kind of Puritan" (2.3.136), and as David Bevington observes, Maria's criticism is directed towards what she perceives as Malvolio's censorious attitude.[6] However, this does not mean Malvolio's characterization is divorced from Puritan controversy altogether. Brian Walsh adds important nuance in this regard, suggesting that while Elizabethan discourses of Puritanism surround Malvolio in the play, Shakespeare is asking questions about what behaviors provoke charges of Puritanism and what social consequences follow from such accusations.[7] In my view, Walsh's assertion that *Twelfth Night* includes, but is not reducible to, both "anti-Puritan satire" and "a critique of anti-Puritan prejudice" captures the right tone of Malvolio's ambivalent relationship to Puritanism.[8]

If previous criticism demonstrates that the Puritan challenge to traditional revelry informs the discourse of *Twelfth Night*, it overlooks how the play is shaped by a conflict between communal and individual hermeneutics that underlay both the Elizabethan Puritan controversy and the Protestant Reformation as a whole. On the one hand, critics often claim Malvolio's handling of the letter exposes him as a bad reader – as David Bevington says, Malvolio "tortures the text to make it yield a suitable meaning, much in the style of Puritan theologizing."[9] According to this reading, Malvolio projects his own identity into the text's ambiguities and

[6] David Bevington, *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, 340, n.139.
[7] Walsh, 103.
[8] Ibid, 95.
[9] Bevington, Introduction, xv.

wrests the letters "*M.O.A.I.*" (2.5.106) into conformity with his *a priori* interpretation. Sean Benson has recently challenged this longstanding view, arguing that Malvolio is a careful reader who, given the letter's clues and style, could hardly arrive at any conclusion other than that it is indeed written by Olivia.[10] By using both written and oral contexts in interpreting the letter, Benson contends, Malvolio reveals himself as a textual pragmatist;[11] moreover, in hoping to detect his name in the M.O.A.I. anagram, Malvolio is applying a Gadamerian hermeneutic whereby the reader "must relate the text to [his] situation if he wants to understand at all" – a reading strategy that Sebastian and Viola both employ to successfully interpret the "text" of one another's bodies in the play's final act.[12] Although Benson observes in passing that Sebastian and Viola have an advantage over Malvolio since they "can test their reading with and against one another," he does not consider this factor any further before concluding that "instead of reading Malvolio as one who is imprisoned because of his tortuous reading, we ought to regard him as one who, despite his careful hermeneutic, is tortured for it."[13]

Although I agree that Malvolio gives the letter a fairer treatment than he is often credited with, I want to argue that Malvolio is not imprisoned primarily because he forces an interpretation upon the letter, as previous criticism has assumed, or for his "careful hermeneutic" as Benson claims. Rather, Malvolio is persecuted because the hermeneutical paradigm he applies is radically different from the one operative in Olivia's household, both in Malvolio's interpretation of other persons' behavior and the letter itself. Indeed, it is telling that Malvolio does not learn the truth about the letter through a critique of his interpretation – it is hardly possible to imagine him being convinced on such grounds – but by discovering that the letter has

[10] Sean Benson, "'*Perverse Fantasies*'?"
[11] Ibid, 262.
[12] Ibid, 284, 264; Hans-George Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 340, 324.
[13] Benson, 285.

its basis in a particular community Malvolio has eschewed throughout the play. As such, Shakespeare shapes Malvolio's epiphanic discovery of the truth about the letter at the end of the play in a manner similar to the criteria set out by the English episcopacy's claim for interpretive authority based upon the spirit's abiding presence in their communal decisions, as opposed to what conformist writers perceived as a "Puritan" mode of self-authorization founded in the individual's claims of exegetical expertise and personal experience of the spirit.

When Malvolio first appears, he demonstrates how apt his name is, since the "ill will" he displays is distinct from the biting yet amicable nature of Feste, who, having recently displeased Olivia, now attempts to win back her favor. Feste accomplishes this by walking a fine line between criticism of Olivia and frivolous play; although he brazenly tells Olivia that he believes her brother is in hell and shows Olivia is a "fool" (1.5.54) for mourning someone she believes is in heaven, he makes his point so wittily that Olivia cannot help but be amused. As the fool, Feste may subject Olivia to a critique that would be unacceptable for anyone else to express, and although he may push her to the limit, Feste can remain confident that he will never be thrown out of doors, which he shows in his casual attitude towards Maria's warnings that Olivia is displeased with him. Feste succeeds in mollifying Olivia, but once he directs his wit towards Malvolio, the steward quickly turns scornful, and abrasively questions any value Olivia may find in "such a barren rascal" (79-80). In defending Feste, Olivia explicates a hermeneutic whose guiding principle is to interpret the discourse of others within the context of their known social history:

> O, you are sick of self-love, Malvolio, and taste with a distempered appetite. To be generous, guiltless and of free disposition is to take those things for bird-bolts that you deem cannon bullets. There is no slander in an allowed fool though he do nothing but rail; nor no railing in a known discreet man though he do nothing but reprove. (86-82)

Olivia's point is that in taking offense from Feste's quip and not returning an amicable repartee, Malvolio's "self-love" obscures what should be his shared understanding that an "allowed fool" should be given the benefit of the doubt not to be engaging in "slander," despite appearances to the contrary, just as a proverbially "discreet man" should not be understood as "railing," but merely offering measured reproof. Olivia's exegetical prescription serves to stretch the limits of community within her household, diminishing the perception of malicious intentions so long as the offender is willing to reciprocate a charitable spirit.

As Donna Hamilton observes, *Twelfth Night*'s combination of "a strong theological resonance" with themes of communal inclusion and exclusion evoke a concept of the church as the Body of Christ in the play.[14] If the religious connotations of Malvolio's "ill will" suggest his adherence to a different guiding principle from the one giving shape to orthodox communion, Maria diagnoses Malvolio's heterodoxy when she says, "it is his grounds of faith that all that look on him love him" (2.3.146-47). Although critics emphasize Malvolio's opposition to festivity or his social ambition as the faults for which the revelers dupe him, both traits flow out of a self-regard so excessive that it virtually functions as heresy within the festive spirit of Olivia's household and Illyria's social hierarchy. Ivo Kamps observes the threat Malvolio poses to a society that can manage an occasional release of festive misrule so long as that subversion remains contained within the dominant order: "While Orsino, Viola, Olivia, Toby, and Maria are all disciplined into the societal norm when they enter into class and gender appropriate marriages and thus serve, uphold, and reproduce the social status quo, it is Malvolio's drive for upward social mobility that endeavors to make misrule permanent in the shape of an interclass

[14] Hamilton, 107.

marriage."[15] Malvolio may be in Olivia's household, but he is not of it. As he walks through Olivia's garden, Malvolio reveals his narcissistic "grounds of faith" (2.3.146) and lends us insight into why he loathed Feste poking fun at him in Olivia's presence earlier, since we discover that she is the means by which Malvolio dreams of transcending his role as steward. Maria's report that Malvolio "has been yonder i' the sun practising behaviour to his own shadow this half-hour" (2.5.14-15) suggests he enjoys privacy and the reveries that he can indulge in alone. Although Malvolio imagines becoming Olivia's husband, she is simply a means to an end for him. "To be count Malvolio" (2.5.32) is his fantasy, and in his will to power, he longs to possess that title's "humour of state" (49) while wielding command over Toby and others. Malvolio has a tortured relationship to Illyria's social hierarchy, as he relishes the thought of ascending that hierarchy so he may one day tell his subordinates, "I know my place, as I would they should do theirs" (50-51), even while this fantasy means transgressing his own "place" as steward.

When Malvolio recalls how "the Lady of the Strachy married the yeoman of the wardrobe" (36-37), he shows awareness that his aspirations conflict with conventional wisdom, but he can nonetheless cite a precedent for his ambition. For the first time, Malvolio finds someone to whom he can relate, although it is only someone he can talk *about,* rather than talk *with*. Examining his past, Malvolio finds what he considers hints of Olivia's interest in him: "Maria once told me she did affect me, and I have heard herself come thus near, that should she fancy it should be one of my complexion. Besides, she uses me with a more exalted respect than anyone else that follows her. What should I think on't?" (21-26). Indeed, what exactly Malvolio should think of such signs becomes the crux of the matter. Benson points out that they are

[15] Ivo Kamps, "Madness and Social Mobility," 238.

ultimately inconclusive, since "affect" can mean "love" or simply "liking" a person, and Olivia's comment that if she were to take an interest in someone, it would be someone of Malvolio's "complexion," is similarly ambiguous.[16] Assuming Maria did not lie when she said Olivia "did affect" Malvolio, he has at least two different interpretive paradigms by which he may make sense of these signs. The first does not flatter his ego and assumes Olivia would not transgress social hierarchy by marrying him; according to this model, Olivia meant "like" by "affect" and her remark about Malvolio's "complexion" simply meant he possesses some quality Olivia wants in a future suitor, even while Malvolio himself is out of the question. However, if Malvolio allows his narcissism to dictate his hermeneutic, then Olivia meant "love" by "affect," she indeed romantically favors Malvolio, and she would not let his position as steward stop her from marrying him. Although this is the version Malvolio hopes is true, he does not seem likely to act on it unless he finds further evidence for it, which Maria's letter provides him.

The mock letter is born out of Malvolio's confrontation with Toby, Andrew and Feste as they carouse into the night. Despite straining social decorum by partying when the household is supposed to be in a state of mourning, the most distinct aspect of the revelers' activity is their intense sociability. While Toby calls for wine for himself and Andrew, Feste enters, and his reference to "the picture of 'we three'" (2.3.16) frames him and the others as a self-deprecatory fellowship. Toby welcomes Feste and this characterization, and an exchange of compliments, money, and singing follows, as Feste sings a tune celebrating present youth, love, and joy in the face of an uncertain and waning future. Pleased with Feste's "contagious breath" (53), they prepare to sing and dance to a "catch" (57) that includes a dialogical merry-go-round of witty one-upmanship. Although Maria warns them, she herself joins them once Malvolio criticizes her,

[16] Benson, 271-73.

telling him, “Go shake your ears” (122) in a manner reminiscent of Toby's rebuke to Malvolio to “sneck up!” (91-92). Indeed, Malvolio’s assertion that he will report Maria to Olivia indicates Maria has defiantly poured the “stoup of wine” (117) Toby has called for.

From the moment Malvolio asks the revelers if they are “mad” (85), it is clear that the two parties are bound to talk past each other. In response to Malvolio’s query, “is there no respect of place, persons nor time in you?” (89-90) Toby simply enlists the word “time” into his own festive discourse, saying, “We did keep time, sir, in our catches” (91). Likewise, when Malvolio tells Toby that if he does not reform himself, then he can expect Olivia to bid him “farewell” (99), Toby reacts as if this is a prompt for merrymaking, and sings, “Farewell, dear heart, since I must needs be gone” (100). Malvolio can only stand flabbergasted, and although the last line Toby sings is a rejoinder to Feste, Malvolio is clearly the one “out o’ tune” (111) here. Malvolio and the revelers are in the same room, but there is such cognitive dissonance between them that they are practically in two different worlds. As the scene develops, Maria assimilates into the group of revelers she has just rebuked. When she tells Malvolio, “Go shake your ears” (2.3.122), she signals her own entry into the festive community now directing its energy against Malvolio. In her ability to mimic Olivia’s writing style, Maria contributes to their cause; whereas earlier Toby and Andrew compared Feste’s singing voice to “a contagious breath” which “to hear by the nose” would be “dulcet in contagion” (53-55), Maria’s plan to “gull” (131) Malvolio now provides them with a similar aroma:

> SIR TOBY Excellent, I smell a device.
> SIR ANDREW I have’t in my nose too.
> SIR TOBY He shall think by the letters that thou wilt drop
> that they come from my niece, and that she’s in love
> with him.
> MARIA My purpose is indeed a horse of that colour.
> SIR ANDREW And your horse now would make him an ass.
> MARIA As I doubt not.

SIR ANDREW O, 'twill be admirable. (157-166)

Maria finds common cause with the revelers' disdain of Malvolio, and once she explains what she will write in the letter, Toby identifies their shared understanding of the meaning and purpose behind the text. Moreover, Maria's pun demonstrates the dexterity in wordplay that has been a staple of the evening's festive banter. She even frames the "sport royal" (167) in a manner recalling Feste's comparison of himself and the other to the "we three" (16) picture, saying, "I will plant you two – and let the fool make a third" (168-69). After Maria leaves, her admission into the festive community is confirmed by Andrew and Toby, who describe her as a "good wench" as well as a "Penthesilea" and "a beagle true bred" (172-74) in reference to her feisty spirit; moreover, upon meeting for the joke, Toby affectionately calls Maria "my little villain" and "my metal of India" (2.5.11-12). Lastly, Fabian is assimilated into the group too: "Come thy ways," (1) Toby tells him, recognizing a festive spirit when he sees one and sensing that Fabian's "way" is the same as the revelers' own.

Although critics frequently conclude that Malvolio succumbs to a temptation to "crush" (2.5.137) the letter's text to suit himself, the joke's success owes more to Maria's skill than any exegetical manipulation on Malvolio's part – indeed, Stephen Booth says that "Sherlock Holmes himself would accept Maria's letter as a love letter from Olivia to Malvolio."[17] According to Benson, the perception that Malvolio twists the text can be attributed to our susceptibility to the opinions of the observers in the box-tree, who "offer their derisive running commentary with such effectiveness that audiences have a difficult time being guarded in their appraisal of

[17] Stephen Booth, *Precious Nonsense*, 147.

Malvolio's reading."[18] As Benson observes, "everything in the letter and everything [Malvolio] knows about Olivia's speech patterns, what she has told him, and what she may well have told Maria about him, points to the conclusion that Malvolio reaches."[19] Maria's letter carries Olivia's form, but none of her spirit, and Olivia's subsequent interaction with Malvolio bears out this disjunction as he recites the text and she responds with bewilderment. This difference between exterior shape and inner substance is one that the play constantly invites us to examine, and for all of his rational scrutiny of the letter, Malvolio fails to grasp the letter's spirit – not because of exegetical tampering on his part, but because his social isolation ensures that he receives, in effect, only half the letter. Malvolio's alienation from the revelers deprives him of the festive, oral text through which the written text was devised and continues to be enjoyed by that same community. Among the revelers, interpersonal dialogue about the letter before and after its creation provides them with a shared framework for its intelligibility, sustained and substantiated by their mutual ridicule of Malvolio. Lacking this communal hermeneutic, Malvolio is at the mercy of his own deductive skills and personal experience. Only once Olivia disavows the letter in the final scene and Fabian explains the prank does Malvolio learn he has made an overstated equivalence between a written verification and an oral one – between the abstract Olivia of the mock letter, whose intentions he can construct without risk of contradiction, and the flesh-and-blood woman herself.

[18] Benson, 275. For myself, Benson's explanation of why readers believe Malvolio juggles the text does not quite suffice, even if it points in the right direction. Toby and the others certainly ridicule Malvolio while he reads the letter, but nowhere do they accuse him of unfairly wresting the text. If we come to any hasty judgment about Malvolio twisting the text, it is a result of us already disliking Malvolio due to his sullen character, noticing that he would prefer to be the letter's addressee, and then connecting his desire to "crush" the letter with our own association of him with conformist depictions of English Puritanism.
[19] Ibid.

If Maria's letter functions as a secular Scripture, read by the "kind of puritan" (2.3.136) Malvolio, then its blessings suggest his mock election. Douglas Trevor's observation that Malvolio's engagement with the letter denotes a particularly "Puritan" view of providence[20] is shared by Maurice Hunt, who posits that by "thanking Jove for the anticipated fulfillment of a materially enriching destiny," Malvolio "highlights a self-centered idea of Providence, one linked in *Twelfth Night* with contemporary stereotypes of Puritans rising socially through commerce and timeserving and thanking the supreme deity for their riches."[21] According to Hunt, *Twelfth Night* dramatizes a late sixteenth-century debate within the English Church over the nature of providence, whereby Malvolio represents a more "Puritan" providence that stresses primary cause and direct revelation, while Viola embodies a more "Hookerian" or even "Popish" view that emphasizes the participation of secondary agents such as people and nature within a divine plan:

> As Cesario, she becomes the agent of Providence, making possible the greater happiness of not only herself but Sebastian, Orsino, and Olivia as well. Had she not disguised herself as her twin brother, Orsino and Olivia would have no way of freeing themselves from a sterile, self-indulgent relationship. Selflessly serving her beloved Orsino's passion for Olivia, the disguised Viola makes possible the liberating love of Olivia for Sebastian and eventually of Orsino for herself. A love offering no self-serving advantage becomes the providential instrument breaking the chains of self-love.[22]

Besides assuming the persona of Cesario that plays a key role in resolving the play's romantic and familial problems, Viola herself is inspired to recognize the role of providence in her own life. Viola's initial hope that "perchance" (1.2.4) her brother has survived the shipwreck grows into a readiness to acknowledge that "if it prove, / Tempests are kind, and salt waves fresh in

[20] Douglas Trevor, "Self-love," 72.
[21] Hunt, *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness*, 79.
[22] Ibid, 83.

love!" (3.4.380-81).[23] Although Hunt highlights how Viola exemplifies a view of providence that emphasizes the role of secondary causes, I argue that she also assumes an orientation of textual reading that is consonant with this view of providence and which was promoted by anti-Puritan clergy in their campaign to extinguish religious dissent.

In his important "Sermon Preached at Paul's Cross" Richard Bancroft spoke out against the "false prophets" he observed afflicting the Church of England, including those "who do pervert the meaning of the Scriptures for the maintenance and defence of any false doctrine, schism, or heresie."[24] Delivered in the midst of the Martin Marprelate controversy,[25] Bancroft defends episcopacy against its Puritan detractors who criticized popish elements in the *Book of Common Prayer* and advocated for Presbyterian polity. Although churchmen such as Thomas Cartwright, John Field, and Thomas Wilcox had been calling for an equality of ministers for years, the anonymously written Marprelate pamphlets are notable for their bold satire and irreverent style in their attacks on the episcopacy, as evidenced, for example, in this passage from the *Epistle*:

> . . . our lord bishops (I say), as John of Canterbury, Thomas of Winchester (I will spare John of London for this time, for it may be he is at bowls, and it is pity to trouble my good brother, lest he should swear too bad), my reverend prelate of Lichfield, with the rest of that swinish rabble, are petty antichrists, petty popes, proud prelates, intolerable withstanders of reformation, enemies of the gospel, and most covetous wretched priests.[26]

If bishops enjoy an elevated role among the clergy, the Marprelate tracts attempt to erode their authority in the eyes of the public. By publicizing the real and imagined faults of bishops, Martin could make them look all too human, thereby demystifying their status as special custodians of

[23] Ibid, 81.
[24] Bancroft, 8.
[25] On Bancroft's sermon, see Mary Morrissey, *Paul's Cross Sermons*, 192-93, 208-10, 218, 219.
[26] Martin Marprelate, *The Epistle*, 10.

the gospel and advancing his view that "there is no pastor of pastors, but he is a pope."[27] Martin's combination of irreverence and satire with colloquial prose, ironic personae, and linguistic play generates a discourse designed to appeal to the masses and arouse the sort of open discussion that could be channeled into a Presbyterian polity. As Mary Morrissey notes, Martin's escalatory rhetoric elicited a polemical response from Bancroft in the 1589 Paul's Cross Sermon. In contrast to Edwin Sandys and John Copcot's discreet "doctrinal" sermons against Puritanism, Bancroft takes a "confutational" approach by associating the movement with heresy and schism while discrediting Puritans as unreliable authorities.[28] Behind Puritanism's attempt to abolish episcopacy and establish an equality of ministers, Bancroft indicates throughout his sermon, is a spirit of religious autonomy. To be sure, Bancroft and other conformist writers construct a caricature of Puritans by characterizing them as thoroughgoing religious individualists and charging them with the excesses of radical sectaries. Biblical interpretation is not left primarily to the individual in Calvin's Presbyterian polity, but to the consensual participation of elected elders, regional synods, and national general assemblies. Still, from an episcopal perspective, Presbyterianism's equality of ministers and inclusion of lay elders in church government signals a step towards individualism inasmuch as it diffuses exegetical authority out from an exclusive group of prelates and vests it in all the church's members. Even though Presbyterianism's representative democracy arranges for this authority to be exercised collectively – a design that remains vulnerable to autonomous dissent due to its commitment to freedom of conscience and

[27] Ibid, 11.
[28] Morrissey, 210-11.

sola Scriptura[29] – English Presbyterians could understandably be cast as religious individualists by episcopacy's defenders owing to their deviance from the Established Church.[30]

Although Simmons connects Malvolio's egoism to Bancroft's description of schismatics as sufferers of "self-love," I suggest the sermon offers additional insight into *Twelfth Night*'s representation of different reading paradigms through Bancroft's appeal to past Christians and the living English bishops as reliable guides for understanding Scripture. When he explains "why so many false prophets do go out into the world," the first and chief reason Bancroft cites is the dissenters' "contempt of Bishops."[31] "Martin Marprelate" and others who deny episcopal authority, Bancroft claims, cannot point to "anie church planted ever since the apostles times"[32] to support their view, which was rejected by past "ancient and godlie fathers."[33] Bancroft also points out that supporters of Presbyterianism admit that the word "bishop" was used in the early

[29] By "*sola Scriptura*" I mean the principle that the Bible is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. According to this principle, the church, councils, tradition, and the fathers possess secondary authority and should be consulted by Christians, but since these are fallible standards, they must be measured against the Bible. In the *Institutes*, John Calvin champions the Scriptures as "the sole rule of perfect wisdom" by which the Church and its councils must be measured (IV.ix.2). Calvin admits that if a doctrinal dispute arises, "the best and surest remedy is for a synod of true bishops to be convened, where the doctrine at issue may be examined" (IV.ix.13), but he does not grant councils infallibility (IV.ix.1-14), and instead argues that they enjoy subordinate authority insofar as they conform to the Scriptures (IV.ix.3-8).

[30] The role that freedom of conscience and *sola Scriptura* play in Presbyterianism is illustrated in William Bradshaw's 1605 *English Puritanism*, where he writes of his fellow "Puritan" believers: "They hold, that the Pastor or Minister of the word, is not to teach any Doctrine as to the Church, grounded upon his own Judgement or opinion of any or all the men in the world. But onely that truth, that he is able to demonstrate and prove evidently, and apparently, by the word of God soundly interpreted, and that the people are not bound to beleeve any Doctrine of Religion or Divinity whatsoever, upon any ground whatsoever, except it be apparently justified by the word, or by necessary consequent deduced from the same" (15-16). Bradshaw says a minister must "demonstrate and prove evidently, and apparently" a doctrine "by the word of God soundly interpreted" – but proven and demonstrated to whose satisfaction? This power seems to reside in the laity, who "are not bound to beleeve" any doctrine unless they judge that it is biblical.

[31] Bancroft, 14.

[32] Ibid, 69.

[33] Ibid, 16.

church, but they believe it means "the ministers of the word and sacraments, without any distinction of degree, or any inequalitie for government or authoritie."[34] Bancroft contends such persons fail to grasp how the term "bishop" has been used within the Christian community throughout history, interpreting it "contrarie to the profession which hitherto we have made to all the world, and contrarie to the testimonies of al antiquitie."[35]

What should interest us in considering this sermon's relationship to *Twelfth Night* is Bancroft's assertion that bishops represent the continuation of a specific community whose shared understanding of the Scriptures provides the key to Biblical exegesis. Citing Jerome, Bancroft complains about the presumption of those who think they can understand the Scriptures outside of episcopal guidance:

> Very just occasion is given to all the godlie to complaine with Saint Ierom in his epistle *ad Paulinum*: Husbandmen, Dawbers, Smiths, Carpenters, Woolsters, Fullers, and other men of such like occupations . . . They al are content to learne of their masters . . . Phisitians deale with matters of phisicke, and men of trade with their owne occupations: Onely the knowledge of the Scriptures is that which every man chalengeth to be skillful in. Learned and unlearned they take upon them to write . . . This art of the scriptures the prattling old woman, the doting old man, the brabling sophister, and generally al men presume they have obtained it, when it is far otherwise: they teare it in peeces, and take upon them to teach it before they have learned it.[36]

Bancroft criticizes those who imagine they can correctly read the Bible without imbibing the oral tradition that originally gave meaning to the Scriptures and which continues to be expressed in the English Church as confirmed by its bishops. In contrast to the autonomous reading practices of schismatics and heretics who are led into error by their self-love, Bancroft encourages a reading orientation in which the subject assumes a posture more selfless than self-centered, more ready to attune itself to others' views rather than assert its own. "Reade the Scriptures, but with

[34] Ibid, 100.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid, 40-41.

sobrietie,"[37] he insists, and the limits of that "sobrietie" are circumscribed within the communion of faith preserved by the bishops: "God hath bound himself by his promise unto his church of purpose, that men by hir good direction might in this point be releeved. To whose godlie determination in matters of question, hir dutifull children ought to submit themselves without any curious or wilfull contradiction."[38] Whereas heretics and schismatics descend into fragmentation, the submission Bancroft advocates would seem to foster unity, since it involves one person binding himself to another in a spirit of meekness. In the Paul's Cross Sermon, the Christian who pursues a knowledge of the Scriptures by stubbornly following his own sense of the text will not attain understanding, but will "caste himself into a labirinth and never finde that he seeketh for."[39] Paradoxically, Bancroft asserts that it is the one who is willing to sacrifice his personal conviction of the Bible's meaning who will discover its meaning in the end. By not preferring what they will, they find what they will.

Richard Hooker made similar appeals to historical consensus, providence, and the suspension of private judgment while he defended the authority of bishops. In *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Hooker criticizes Calvin's insistence that all churches must have a Presbyterian discipline, asking why this interpretation of Scripture has only now been discovered:

> A very strange thing sure it were that such a discipline as ye speak of should be taught by Christ and his Apostles in the word of God, and no Church ever have found it out, not received it till this present time; contrariwise, the government against which ye bend yourselves be observed everywhere throughout all generations and ages of the Christian world, no Church ever perceiving the word of God to be against it. We require you to find out but one Church upon the face of the whole earth, that hath been ordered by your discipline, or hath not been ordered by ours, that is to say, by episcopal regiment, since the time that the blessed Apostles were here conversant . . . Ye plainly hold that from the

[37] Ibid, 42.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.

> very Apostles' times till this present age wherein yourselves imagine ye have found out a right pattern of sound discipline, there never was any time safe to be followed.[40]

By Hooker's view, the Puritan account of history judges that all churches have been deceived about episcopacy since apostolic times. Implicit within this historical vision is a model of providence that vindicates the minority against the majority, as God intervenes to help the few escape the longstanding errors of the many. Hooker acknowledges that God indeed gives direct revelation only to a few, but it is to the biblical prophets and the apostles:

> There are but two ways whereby the spirit leadeth men into all truth: the one extraordinary, the other common; the one belonging but unto some few, the other extending itself unto all that are of God; the one that which we call by a special divine excellency Revelation, the other Reason. If the Spirit by such revelation have discovered unto them the secrets of that discipline out of Scripture, they must profess themselves to be all (even men, women, and children) Prophets.[41]

By Hooker's view, Puritans fail to distinguish between divine revelation and their own fallible interpretations of Scripture. In performing biblical interpretation, Hooker believes, the use of reason and a deference to how previous Christians interpreted Scripture must be applied in order to arrive at an exegesis inspired by the Holy Spirit. Finding little biblical support for the idea that Presbyterianism is a divinely ordained polity and no evidence that past Christians read the Scriptures as if they condemn episcopacy, Hooker concludes that the Puritans are not inspired by the Holy Spirit, but instead are led by "the fraud of that evil Spirit which is even in his illusions strong."[42]

For Hooker, those who believe they have discovered a universal church discipline in the Scriptures that has been overlooked by past generations of Christians may find such an approach "safe" in its claim to shrug off the possibility of human error for an unadulterated reception of

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[40] Richard Hooker, *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, 20-21.
[41] Ibid, 16.
[42] Ibid, 17.

the divine, but the Puritan refusal of the tangible church as it exists in the present only leaves them with an abstract church of the imagination. Rather than separating themselves from the common lot of Christians to seek out those who share their vision of what the church should be, Hooker calls Puritans to an encounter with the church as it is, as it lives and speaks in the persons of the bishops:

> I would therefore know whether for the ending of these irksome strifes wherein you and your followers do stand thus formally divided against the authorized guides of this Church, and the rest of the people subject unto their charge, whether I say ye be content to refer your cause to any other higher judgement than your own, or else intend to persist and proceed as ye have begun, till yourselves can be persuaded to condemn yourselves. If your determination be this, we can be but sorry that ye should deserve to be reckoned with such, of whom God himself pronounceth, "*The way of peace they have not known*."[43]

Hooker is not calling the Puritans to debate, but to self-offering for the sake of peace and unity in the church. In making this appeal, he gives insight into the nature of episcopal authority: their episcopal dominion is not exercised when the faithful agree with the bishops' judgments, but when those decisions are disagreed with but submitted to nonetheless. Arguing that "nature, scripture, and experience itself, have all taught the world to seek for the ending of contentions by submitting itself unto some judicial and definitive sentence," Hooker cites Deuteronomy 17:8-12 to argue that an authoritative arbitration is a solution for ending controversy that "God himself in the law prescribeth" and notes that "his Spirit it was which directed the very first Christian Churches in the world" when they held council and decided Gentile converts need not observe most of the law of Moses or undergo circumcision.[44] Like Bancroft, Hooker believes legitimate biblical exegesis does not find authentication in the self of an interpreting subject, but demands the oral verification of another. The verification provided by episcopal authority draws

[43] Ibid, 28.
[44] Ibid, 28-29.

Christians out of themselves and their own natural "willfulness and self-liking" into self-offering communion with the rest of the church.[45] God has left Christians with this means of resolution, Hooker contends, in accordance with His own harmonious nature. In the *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, finding peace in God's will comes through finding peace in another's will, and for Hooker, this is performed through the self-offering of one's interpretive conclusions to the episcopacy's adjudication. Those who resist this touchstone, Hooker implies, are serving no "truth" but their own.

To demonstrate how Viola practices a form of reading consistent with the self-effacing hermeneutic advocated by Bancroft and Hooker, I first want to show how the two characters in whose lives she intervenes, Orsino and Olivia, suffer from a narcissistic pathology similar to Malvolio's. Malvolio is hardly the sole egoist in *Twelfth Night*, but he is the one who most painfully pays for his blinding self-centeredness. While Malvolio's narcissism masks itself under a veneer of desire for Olivia and alienates him from others, we find Olivia and Orsino also wallowing in self-absorption disguised as love for another, which isolates them from Illyria and threatens their participation in its social regeneration. Orsino may pine away for Olivia, but as Valerie Traub says, he is "more in love with love than with any particular object."[46] "For such as I am all true lovers are," Orsino declares, "Unstaid and skittish in all motions else / Save in the constant image of the creature / That is beloved" (2.4.17-20). Far from being dominated with visions of Olivia, Orsino focuses on the "spirit of love" (1.1.9) that has overtaken him as he indulges in its various sensations. Wallowing in his feelings, Orsino resists personal encounter

[45] Ibid, 30.
[46] Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety,* 135.

with Olivia for much of the play, sending Cesario to woo her in his stead.[47] By avoiding the direct rejection possible in meeting with Olivia, Orsino can prolong his intoxicating lovesickness. Like Malvolio daydreaming of Olivia marrying him and becoming "count Malvolio" (2.5.32), Orsino delights in a privatized and abstracted Olivia who is malleable to his will and fantasizes of becoming her "one self king!" (1.2.38).

So long as Orsino delegates his wooing to Cesario, the "spirit of love" he relishes is a self-insulating spirit that compels him to insist, "I myself am best / When least in company" (1.4.37-38). As R.S. White observes, Orsino's self-centeredness is discernible in his choice of sung music, "the form of communication closest to non-referential utterance, whose meaning in this case is constructed not from a rational content but from the emotions projected into it by Orsino."[48] In contrast to the "catch" (2.3.57) the revelers share with each other in expression of communal indulgence, Orsino's preferred music allows him to bask in self-indulgence. When Orsino does request lyrical music from Feste, death and self-seclusion are its themes, as the lovesick speaker asks to be placed in a "black coffin" (2.4.60) and buried in secret. "My part of death no one so true / Did share it" (57-58), the narrator declares, wailing that no one else experienced such a deep love as that which killed him. However, as the rest of the song makes clear, the speaker takes measures to ensure the suppression of any love comparable to his own, particularly if that love is directed at him:

> Not a flower, not a flower sweet
> On my black coffin let there be strewn.
> Not a friend, not a friend greet
> My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown.
> A thousand thousand sighs to save,

[47] For the purposes of this chapter, I use "encounter" to refer to a character physically or verbally interacting with another while in his or her presence, and by "fantasy" I mean a character contemplating another while in that person's absence.
[48] R.S. White, "Estranging Word and Self," 113.

Lay me O where
Sad true lover never find my grave,
To weep there. (59-66)

These are not the laments of someone forgotten by the world, but the burial arrangements of someone that wants to shun the world. Indeed, he believes that unless he hides his grave, a "sad true lover" will come to mourn him – someone whose very existence he rejected earlier in the song. Illustrative of Orsino's own situation, the song depicts someone who considers his passions unparalleled, but in order to maintain that illusion, he must ensure that he is left alone so no one may express a comparable love towards him.

Alongside Malvolio and Orsino, Olivia completes a trio of characters in *Twelfth Night* indulging their own wills under a professed devotion to another whose controlled abstraction prevents an encounter with the truly Other. Although Olivia diagnoses that Malvolio is "sick of self-love" (1.5.86), she overlooks her own vanity manifesting itself through excessive grief for her dead brother. For seven years, Olivia will conceal herself under veil "like a cloistress" (1.1.27) and daily offer "eye-offending brine" (29) in order "to season / A brother's dead love, which she would keep fresh / And lasting in her sad remembrance" (29-31). Like the "shapes" of "fancy" (14) that captivate Orsino and the "contemplation" (2.5.28) that entrances Malvolio, imagination keeps Olivia self-enclosed and dwelling on the dead while shunning the living "company / And sight of men" (1.2.37-38).

Olivia expresses her desire for self-enclosure during her first meeting with Viola disguised as Cesario. Although Viola praises Olivia's face as "beauty truly blent" (1.5.231), she rebukes Olivia for withholding her beauty from others: "Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive / If you will lead these graces to the grave / And leave the world no copy" (233-35). Olivia's reply is telling: "O Sir, I will not be so hard-hearted. I will give out divers schedules of my beauty. It

shall be inventoried and every particle and utensil labeled to my will" (214-216). Through a parodic blazon, she takes a plain inventory of her features: "item, two lips, indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to them; item, one neck, one chin and so forth" (239-240). Rather than present herself to the world through marriage and offspring, Olivia would merely leave behind a catalogue of her features. "I see what you are, you are too proud" (242), Cesario says, and like Malvolio's "grounds of faith" (2.3.146), this pride functions as a personal creed, whereby behavior conforming to it is welcomed as "comfortable doctrine" (1.5.216) and any contradiction against Olivia's will constitutes "heresy" (221).[49] Olivia's cataloguing of her features may seem like an attempt at humility, since she is deflecting praise and casting herself in uninspiring terms, but this humility is affected by Olivia in order to quell Orsino's interest in her. The central phrase of her imagined inventory is "my will". Opening her heart to someone may lead Olivia to experience the vulnerability of personal encounter and impart her beauty to the world in a manner not completely on her own terms. Alternatively, Olivia's calculated inventory lets her avoid accommodating the Other and keeps her "will" in complete control.

In contrast to the isolating and self-serving egoism of these characters, Viola's self-denying nature grants her a powerful adaptability that allows her to excel in interpersonal communication and move freely between the Illyrian households. As a woman just rescued from shipwreck on Illyria's strange shores, Viola is immediately placed in a position of dependence: she must rely on the Captain for information regarding her whereabouts, what she should do in Illyria, and whether Sebastian has survived. Although Viola wishes he is still alive, she does not

[49] As Keir Elam notes in The Arden Shakespeare *Twelfth Night*, Cesario's communication of Orsino's suit is "heretical" because it is "contrary to the *doctrine* (216) of Olivia's own thoughts and desires" (199, n.221).

assume it, and turns to the sailors to confirm whether her wish holds merit. In reply, the Captain tells Viola to "assure" (1.2.8) herself that Sebastian was taking measures to survive:

> . . . *I saw* your brother,
> Most provident in peril, bind himself –
> Courage and hope both teaching him the practice –
> To a strong mast that lived upon the sea,
> Where, like Arion on the dolphin's back,
> *I saw* him hold acquaintance with the waves
> So long as *I could see*. (10-16, emphasis mine)

Viola's survival inspires her with hope that Sebastian may have not drowned, but that hope finds decisive sustenance in the witness of another: "Mine own escape unfoldeth to my hope," she says, "Whereto thy speech serves for authority – / The like of him" (17-19). That Viola should look to another person's testimony to verify how far her personal will comports with reality is not an isolated incident, but a habit of hers throughout the play. When Antonio mistakes a disguised Viola for Sebastian and rebukes her for not helping him as he is arrested, Viola's hope for her brother's survival is reinvigorated through hearing Antonio's speech:

> Methinks his words do from such passion fly
> That he believes himself. So do not I.
> Prove true, imagination, O prove true,
> That I, dear brother, be now ta'en for you! (3.4.370-373)

As Sir Toby and Andrew step aside after the commotion of the arrest, Viola further reflects on what she has heard:

> He named Sebastian. I my brother know
> Yet living in my glass. Even such and so
> In favour was my brother, and he went
> Still in this fashion, colour, ornament,
> For him I imitate. O, if it prove,
> Tempests are kind, and salt waves fresh in love! (376-381)

Viola knows she has never met Antonio before, and is struck by the conviction of his mistaken belief. Antonio's certainty rests on his identification of Viola's disguise as Cesario with

Sebastian, but without oral acknowledgment from Viola that she knows him, Antonio merely "believes himself" here. Antonio's self-assurance only brings him self-deception, but paradoxically, Viola's attentiveness to his words provides her with further evidence of the truth of her brother's survival: "He named Sebastian." Unlike those characters whose self-absorption leads them to destructive illusions, Viola makes it a point that her "imagination" must be shared by others before it "proves true" and is worthy of her full belief.

As Hunt points out, Hooker's view of providence is such that although God wills all people to be saved and grants them sufficient grace to effect salvation, only those whose behavior responds to that grace will be saved.[50] Although Hunt points to "Viola's generous attitudes and deeds"[51] as manifestations of her cooperation with grace, I want to look more closely at how this behavior comports with the self-divestment called for by anti-Puritan writers and shapes Viola's fortunes in Illyria. While in Illyria, Viola decides that she will "serve" (1.2.52) others until an appropriate time when she may safely reveal her true identity – presumably, upon reuniting with Sebastian. That Shakespeare stakes her survival upon her ability to serve in Orsino's household allows Viola to act in a manner contrary to the heretical spirit denounced by Bancroft, who quotes Cyprian in saying that "the beginning of heresies is . . . when men begin to please themselves."[52] Viola's service takes the form of self-denial, as she masks her own sex and carries out Orsino's courtship of Olivia, even as Viola herself falls in love with Orsino. Although Viola tells Orsino, "I'll do my best / To woo your lady" this employment is a "barful strife" for her because Viola "would be his wife" (1.4.40-42). Nonetheless, Viola attempts to recite the love speech, which Olivia first criticizes as "feigned"

[50] Hunt, *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness*, 86-87.
[51] Ibid, 87.
[52] Bancroft, 22.

(1.5.191) and then rejects as outright "heresy" (221) once she learns it is from Orsino. However, Viola has told Olivia that after she reads the speech, she will disclose the "heart" of its "message" (185-86). While Viola's admission that the text originates from "Orsino's bosom" and "the first [chapter] of his heart" (219-220) may be what she has in mind here, she now vigorously places her own heart into Orsino's cause and abandons the speech's conventional rhetoric of courtly love. As Jonathan Bate points out, Viola now "speaks instead with an authenticity and intensity that immediately strike a chord in Olivia" – an earnestness generated in Viola, Bates concludes, "because it is really Viola speaking of her own secret love for Orsino; her plight, which requires silence and concealment of her feelings, appears to be like Echo's."[53] Indeed, Viola's profession that she would "Hallow [Olivia's] name to the reverberate hills / And make the babbling gossip of the air / Cry out 'Olivia!' " (264-66) positions her as Echo to Olivia's Narcissus.[54] Viola's willingness to enlist her own romantic fervor into Orsino's service – to become, in effect, a fully animated "echo" of his will – recalls the radical commitment to communal assimilation to which anti-Puritan writers summoned dissidents. Although Viola does not win Olivia over to Orsino, Viola pulls Olivia out of her self-absorbed enclosure, and as Hunt puts it, "makes possible the liberating love of Olivia for Sebastian and eventually of Orsino for herself."[55] In following the other-directed hermeneutic promoted by Bancroft and Hooker and eschewing the self-directed orientation embodied in the "kind of Puritan" (2.3.136) Malvolio, Viola empowers others to realize their desires, and in the process, attains her own.

Viola's self-denial becomes self-sacrifice in the final scene, where she asserts a willingness to die "a thousand deaths" (5.1.129) for Orsino if it will ease his pain. In a passage

[53] Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid*, 148-49.
[54] Ibid, 148.
[55] Hunt, *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness,* 83.

echoing Abraham's attempt to sacrifice Isaac and Christ's identification as the sacrificial Lamb of God, Orsino becomes enraged upon discovering that Olivia is in love with his servant, and declares he will kill Cesario: "I'll sacrifice the lamb that I do love / To spite a raven's heart within a dove" (5.1.126-27). Until now, Viola has concealed her love for Orsino, but once he admits his affection for her and demands she give up her own life to satisfy him, Viola expresses her true feelings precisely because doing so is now aligned with service to Orsino, as she declares she loves him "More than I love these eyes, more than my life, / More by all mores than e'er I shall love wife" (131-32). That Shakespeare positions Viola's avowal of her readiness to die for love of Orsino just before the series of revelations seems apt, as if she must be ready to perform love's ultimate sacrifice before the other characters can find their appropriate love matches and Viola herself can fulfill Olivia's prompt to "take thy fortunes up, / Be that thou know'st thou art, and then thou art / As great as that thou fear'st" (144-146). Ironically, Viola does this not by joining Olivia in marriage and becoming Orsino's social equal, but by casting off her disguise and marrying Orsino herself.

If the self-isolation of Malvolio, Orsino, and Olivia is sustained by indulging an abstraction that carries the outward form of the Other but lacks its authentic voice, *Twelfth Night*'s confusions are resolved through a personal encounter between brother and sister: an oral exchange that allows them to test and corroborate each other's experiences. As Benson points out, the siblings are reading each other's bodies in the last scene's encounter, and "like Malvolio, they cannot simply rely merely on the surface of the text – the appearance of the body – before them."[56] But unlike Malvolio, who interprets a letter according to his own private reason and personal history, Viola and Sebastian can scrutinize each other's bodies and receive oral replies

[56] Benson, 281.

that lead to clarification. As the two exchange their personal histories and experience of shipwreck, they progressively recognize themselves in the other's account, and the encounter culminates in an exchange of stichomythic dialogue:

> VIOLA My father had a mole upon his brow.
> SEBASTIAN And so had mine.
> VIOLA And died that day when Viola from her birth
> Had numbered thirteen years.
> SEBASTIAN O, that record is lively in my soul.
> He finished indeed his mortal act
> That day that made my sister thirteen years. (238-44)

Although Benson notes in passing that Viola and Sebastian have an "advantage" over Malvolio since they "can test their reading with and against one another, testing each other's history against their mutual presumption of the other's death," my claim is that this "advantage" is more crucial to the play's relation to contemporary religious controversy than has been hitherto recognized.[57] As I have demonstrated, Viola relies on an interpersonal form of reading, in which the oral testimony of others serves as verification of her own hopes. As the play develops, her optimism about the prospects for Sebastian's survival and a romance with Orsino grows in proportion to how much these possibilities receive attestation in the mouths of others, and final confirmation is found only when Sebastian and Orsino themselves echo Viola's wishes. As a foil to the "kind of puritan" Malvolio, Viola enacts a form of reading that parallels the anti-Puritan discourse of Bancroft and Hooker, a reading in which the orthodoxy of a belief is determined according to its consistency with the collective faith passed down by each generation of bishops. In both cases, shared memory rather than private reason operates as the criterion for authenticity – for "imagination" to "prove true" (3.4.372).

[57] Ibid, 284.

If *Twelfth Night* presents a nostalgic celebration of traditional communal revelry as founded upon a hermeneutic of personal encounter, the failure to integrate Malvolio casts a shadow over the play's end and leaves *Twelfth Night*'s achievement of communion imperfect. At the start of the play, Malvolio could be described as an outsider posing as an insider, but in the final scene, he breaks with Olivia's household altogether, leveling a threat of revenge that would prove prophetic in light of the Puritan closure of the theaters in 1642 and abolishment of episcopacy in 1646. Modern critics have argued that Malvolio may begin to receive sympathy from some audience members due to the mistreatment he receives in the fourth act, where the prank goes beyond observing Malvolio's behavior to confining him in a dark room and subjecting him to a mock exorcism. Hunt suggests that Malvolio's orthodox opinion of the soul establishes "a certain tolerance for this egotist" while Marianne Novy points out that some in the audience may identify more with Malvolio's coherent responses than Feste's nonsensical discourse in the dark room scene.[58] Citing Peter Lake and Michael Quester's observation that martyrs could receive pity from an ideologically opposed audience if the victim's suffering was excessive or born piously[59], Trevor argues that Feste's interrogation of Malvolio presents us with just such a moment, as Malvolio resolutely resists any attempts to make him question his sanity. As Trevor points out, "Shakespeare chooses at this juncture not to have Malvolio questioned in such a way that would reveal his nonconformity. Instead, it is only Malvolio's most basic commitments to Christian doctrine that Feste tests."[60] By disapproving of the transmigration of souls and receiving censure from Feste for holding out against this opinion, Malvolio "is no

[58] Hunt, *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness*, 85; Novy, 52.
[59] Peter Lake and Michael Questier, *The Antichrist's Lewd Hat,* 272. Here it is useful to compare Lake and Questier's point with Marvin Carlson's description in *Theatre Semiotics* of an "active" theatrical experience, which generates "a meaning for a line or action not at all intended by the producers . . . [and wrests] interpretive control entirely and openly from expected patterns" (14).
[60] Trevor, 80.

longer ostracized in *Twelfth Night* as a nonconformist," but rather "becomes a Christian martyr in broad terms."[61] Indeed, Allison Hobgood claims that at the end of the play, when Malvolio emerges from the closet and reveals his abuse to Olivia, "he exposes not only his fellow characters, but a complicit audience as well."[62] Naturally, the question arises whether modern critics have overestimated the degree to which *Twelfth Night* invites us to pity Malvolio.[63] In a challenge to the Malvolio-centric "torture interpretation" favored by modern critics, Becky Kemper reminds us that that the First Folio's stage direction for Act 4, scene 2 reads "*Malvolio within*," not "Enter Malvolio within," indicating that Malvolio is not actually onstage as he is questioned by Feste.[64] "If the audience cannot see Malvolio or his pained reactions," Kemper contends, "they do not sympathize with his plight, and the scene becomes a showcase for a clown."[65] In attempting to correct what she perceives as a critical overestimation of Malvolio's victim status, though, Kemper herself seems to be overreaching a bit here. Scholars who have investigated the possible stagings of this scene do indicate that Malvolio would have been offstage, but they are not certain he always would have been completely invisible to an audience.[66] John Astington, for instance, suggests that the "*Malvolio within*" stage direction could mean that Malvolio was indeed offstage, but it could also indicate that the "dark house" was visible in a space below the Elizabethan trapdoor; alternatively, Mariko Ichikawa argues that the word "*within*" could mean that an actor was partially visible behind the tiring-house facade.[67]

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[61] Ibid.
[62] Allison Hobgood, "*Twelfth Night*'s 'Notorious Abuse' of Malvolio," 10.
[63] For a discussion of how modern sympathy for Malvolio may be anachronistic, see Jensen, 187-88.
[64] Becky Kemper, "A Clown in the Dark House," 47.
[65] Ibid.
[66] John H. Astington, "Malvolio."; David Carnegie, "'Maluolio Within'."; Mariko Ichikawa, "'*Maluolio Within*'."; Peter Thomson, *Shakespeare's Theatre*.
[67] Astington, 61-62; Ichikawa, 140.

As for productions that would fully conceal Malvolio in this scene, his capacity to elicit a martyr-like sympathy would be significantly weakened, but not fully extinguished – Malvolio's pleas remain, and under the control of a dynamic performer, a pitiful voice inflection could likely inspire compassion from a portion of the spectators. Whether Malvolio was both visibly and audibly present or only his voice could be heard, most audience members likely would have enjoyed Feste's harassment of Malvolio, while for some, that amusement may have been tempered with pity as the scene wore on. To my mind, Kemper is right in asserting Feste's comic performance as the centerpiece of the scene, but if modern criticism has at times overestimated Malvolio's ability to draw sympathy, we risk making an equal mistake in dismissing its possibility altogether.

Twelfth Night scholarship has long shown that for all of the whimsical abuse Malvolio receives in the dark room, there is a method to the scene's madness. Examining the pranks against Malvolio within the context of early modern treatments for mental disorders, Kamps argues that Malvolio's imprisonment and exorcism are the culmination of a scheme by Maria and Sir Toby to expose the steward's social ambition as a form of madness.[68] Hunt and Simmons emphasize the religious satire behind the scene – Hunt points out that conforming Protestants frequently characterized Puritans as mad, whereas Simmons connects Malvolio to nonconforming Puritans like Giles Wiggington, who was imprisoned by Archbishop Whitgift for persistently disseminating anti-episcopal opinions.[69] Jensen and Hamilton argue for additional religious topicality in the scene, as both find that the mock exorcism echoes Samuel Harsnett's pamphlet, *A Discovery of the Fraudulent Practices of One John Darrel,* in which Harsnett

[68] Kamps, 234. Kamps astutely observes that in *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare explores madness not as an "internal, psychological, or humoral condition" but rather an "external social condition" that a community projects upon its deviant members (Ibid).
[69] Hunt, Shakespeare's *Religious Allusiveness*, 84; Simmons, 200-01.

attempts to expose Darrel's practice of exorcism – indeed all exorcisms – as fraudulent.[70] Whereas in Harsnett's pamphlet the Puritan is the one perpetrating a hoax, in *Twelfth Night* the "kind of Puritan" Malvolio falls victim to it. For C.L. Barber, the dark room symbolizes the insulating effect of Malvolio's "self-limiting automatism," while Alexander Leggatt observes that "egotism and loveless solitude are a kind of damnation, and the imprisoned Malvolio is our clearest image of this."[71] Kemper likewise views this scene as a response to Malvolio's singularity, connecting his punishment to the "Charivaris" phenomenon, or public shaming rituals, that early modern societies practiced upon their deviant members.[72] Thus, the dark room scene not only functions as Feste's personal revenge for the slights he received earlier in act 1, scene 5, but it incorporates contemporary religious, medical, and social elements to enact a communal reversal of Malvolio's idiosyncrasies.

According to Sir Toby, Malvolio's confinement is "for our pleasure and his penance till our very pastime, tired out of breath, prompt us to have mercy on him" (3.4.133-35). If Malvolio's self-importance causes him to misread himself, others, and the mock letter over the course of the play, one aspect of his "penance" (3.4.133-35) is that Feste attempts to discipline Malvolio into surrendering his interpretive faculties. By insisting that Malvolio "errest" (42) in his perception that the room is dark, Feste presses Malvolio to abdicate his own sensory impressions; likewise, in asserting that the room has "bay-windows transparent as barricadoes" and "clerestories . . . lustrous as ebony" (36-38), Feste demands that Malvolio give up his own sense of reason. Quite understandably, Hunt comments that it "seems unfair" that Feste should rebuke Malvolio for rejecting Pythagoras's belief in the migration of the soul – such a belief,

[70] Jensen, 180; Hamilton, 89.
[71] Barber, 256; Alexander Leggatt, *Shakespeare's Comedy of Love*, 244.
[72] Kemper, 47.

after all, was heretical by early modern Christian standards – and yet, I would question whether Malvolio has indeed "answered correctly to this strange catechism" as Hunt supposes.[73] Feste undoubtedly takes mischievous glee playing the contrarian in his role as Sir Topas, but that very contrariness is a direct challenge to Malvolio's sickness of "self-love" (1.5.86). Far from an attempt at Christian indoctrination, in which case Malvolio's answer would indeed have been the correct one, Feste's catechesis is rather a comic reeducation of Malvolio into relinquishing his own outlook and adopting the standpoint of the other. To further illustrate this point, it is useful to compare this scene to Petruccio's treatment of Katherine as they return to Padua in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Twice, Petruccio demands that Katherine relinquish her perception of reality and admit to his own interpretations: that the sun shining down on them is actually the moon, and that an old man they encounter is instead a young woman. Once Katherine relents and calls the sun the moon, Petruccio changes his mind and says it is the sun, to which Katherine replies: "What you will have it named, even that it is, / And so it shall be still for Katherine" (4.5.22-23). Similarly, when Vincentio approaches and Petruccio addresses him as a young maid, Katherine follows suit, only to then be rebuked by Petruccio, who again changes his claim: "Why, how now, Katherine, I hope thou art not mad. This is a man, old, wrinkled, faded, withered, And not a maiden as thou sayst he is." (43-45). Following his lead, Katherine says to Vincentio, "Now I perceive thou art a reverend father. Pardon, I pray thee, for my mad mistaking." (49-50). In demanding that Katherine call the sun the moon and an old man a maiden, Pettrucio's assertions are so preposterous that he himself must not believe them, but the particulars are not the point; rather, the goal for Pettrucio is to press her to submit to him and condition Katherine for life in marital community, with him as its patriarchal head. In *Twelfth*

[73] Hunt, *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness*, 85.

Night, I contend, we find a similar attempt towards radical conditioning at play. Just as Petruchio sets the criteria for Katherine to consider herself sane or mad, Feste tells Malvolio, "Thou shalt hold th'opinion of Pythagoras ere I will allow of thy wits" (4.2.57-58). Like Pettrucio's insistence that the sun is the moon and an old man is a maid, the very absurdity of Feste's propositions underscores that this not a battle of wits, but of wills, and whose "say" (40) will prevail over the other's.

However much the gulling of Malvolio exposes the severe social limitations of his narcissism, by the end of the play it is clear that the scheme has only helped exacerbate existing tensions in Olivia's household. To be sure, Malvolio is ultimately responsible for his decision to separate from the other characters at the end of the play; while Malvolio undoubtedly experiences shame in the final scene, his expression of that shame through a bitter repudiation of Olivia's household rather than self-criticism suggests that his vanity has not been diminished, but merely offended. Malvolio's retreat is one last expression of his self-love – he cannot bear the humiliation he has received from those he considers beneath him, and in the presence of Olivia, no less. However, Fabian's exhortation that all parties "May rather pluck on laughter than revenge, / If that the injuries be justly weighed / That have on both sides passed" (360-62) seems naive, if not disingenuous. Feste's mockery of Malvolio quickly thereafter indicates how likely everyone will be laughing at Malvolio more than with him, and Fabian's implication that there is an equality between the injuries is rather dubious. On the one hand, the mock letter trick serves as a satisfying requital for Malvolio's slights and vanity; indeed, its brilliance resides in how little effort it requires from the revelers – once the text is composed and planted, they simply watch Malvolio do the rest and make a fool of himself. Malvolio's willingness to obey the more ridiculous commands, his probable enjoyment in treating Sir Toby and the servants with

contempt, and his persistence in the delusion despite Olivia's ensuing bewilderment highlight just how much the prank depends on his active participation. This is a participation that is invited in the letter's culmination, but not compelled: "Go to, thou art made if thou desir'st to be so; if not, let me see thee a steward still, the fellow of servants and not worthy to touch Fortune's fingers." (2.5.157). Unlike the clever manipulation that ignites the letter trick, physical force sustains Malvolio's confinement in the dark room, dehumanizing him to the point that he justly complains to Feste, "They have here propertied me" (4.2.91). As Cynthia Lewis observes, the mock letter positions Malvolio to become "an agent of his own undoing" whereas in the case of his imprisonment, "he is no longer free to embarrass himself and perhaps, by extension, to discover his folly."[74] The coercive nature of Malvolio's confinement resonates as a light and comic form of the incarceration and interrogation faced by religious dissidents in early modern England, but does this mean that Malvolio himself becomes "a Christian martyr in broad terms" in *Twelfth Night* as Trevor asserts?[75] As I have said, Malvolio can surely draw sympathy from an audience, but like Walsh, I find Trevor's claim excessive.[76] Malvolio's martyr status has potential only in proportion to the degree he is subjected to martyr-like suffering, and in an age when whipping and racking were common punishments for perceived enemies of the state, Malvolio's mistreatment is relatively gentle.[77] Degrading as it is for Malvolio to be held against and his will,

[74] Cynthia Lewis, *Particular Saints*, 102.
[75] Trevor, 80.
[76] Walsh, 111, n. 62.
[77] Hobgood goes so far as to imagine Malvolio emerging from the dark room "battered, bruised, and bleeding" in the play's last scene (11). Although Malvolio would likely appear disheveled due to being thrust into the dark room against his will, Hobgood's insinuation that the revelers have physically beaten Malvolio seems implausible: neither in his letter nor in his verbal recitation of his abuses to Olivia does Malvolio mention this kind of mistreatment. And yet, if he had been beaten, would it not be at the fore of his accusations?

harassed for a few hours, and then publicly embarrassed, these abuses are simply not commensurate with the physical torments which comprised the theatre of the gallows.[78]

Unlike Shylock's bitter forced conversion in *The Merchant of Venice* or Gloucester's outrageous mutilation in *King Lear*, Shakespeare's decision to suffuse the dark room scene with humor and farce suggests to me that any critique of state policy *Twelfth Night* may be offering is a comparatively muted one. *Twelfth Night* does not scrutinize the physical tortures and executions that religious dissidents were subjected to so much as the play questions the subtler violence that lay behind coerced indoctrination and its ability to effect authentic conversion. Here Lewis's observation about Malvolio's loss of freedom proves especially instructive. The duress Malvolio faces in the dark room contrasts not only with the agency he retains in interpreting the letter and performing its instructions, but also Viola's free submission to Orsino (1.2.52, 1.4.40-42) and the workings of time (1.2.57, 2.3.40). Sir Topas's constrained discipline of Malvolio all but ensures that if the steward was to surrender and admit to the transmigration of the soul, he would not be making the Pythagorean doctrine his own, but like those who outwardly conformed to state religion primarily to avoid persecution, he would be paying lip service to a viewpoint that remains utterly alien to him.

At the end of Barnabe Rich's story *Of Two Brethren and Their Wives*, which has often been suggested as a source for *Twelfth Night*'s subplot, a man who is at his wit's end with his shrewish wife decides to dress her in rags, scratch her with a bramble to the point of bleeding,

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[78] Indeed, Kemper points out that in *Twelfth Night*'s dark room scene, Shakespeare significantly reduces the physical aspect of Malvolio's suffering when compared to the play's source material. Discussing the dark room scene, she writes, "The same theatrical device appears in Barnabe Riche's *Farewell to Military Profession*, where a husband treats his scolding wife as if she were mad. However, the source is far more brutal. Her dissembling husband and a group of neighbors chain the wife's leg to the floor, bind her arms, scratch her with brambles and *shout* prayers at her" (45-46).

and confine her in "a dark house" with a chain tied to her leg.[79] He then calls his neighbors over to see her, tells them his wife is mad, and together they pray for her, exhorting her to change her ways. Unsurprisingly, this treatment only further enrages his wife, making her "become from euil to worse" – like the conclusion of *Twelfth Night*, the story ends in estrangement, with the husband fleeing from his wife "into a strange country, where he consumed the rest of his life."[80] Unlike Rich's story, however, Shakespeare is not content to let the opposed parties go their separate ways; instead, we learn that the double wedding that the characters look forward to at the play's end hinges on the recovery of the "maid's garments" (5.1.270-73) Viola entrusted to the Captain upon arriving in Illyria, and that this Captain is now being held in prison over a suit put against him by Malvolio (271-73). For much of the play, the revelers have tried to expose Malvolio's presumption of autonomy for the delusion that it is, but now Shakespeare goes out of his way to make the point that Olivia's household likewise depends on Malvolio, and that it must "entreat him to a peace" (373) before they can arrive at that final moment when full communion is achieved and "golden time convents" (375). While *Twelfth Night* posits that peace may be hoped for through the individual's self-sacrifice to another, the play also suggests that this submission cannot be forcibly taken, but only freely given. In this sense, *Twelfth Night* asks its early seventeenth-century audience to consider Viola's counsel to Olivia in relation to their own lives, that "what is yours to bestow is not yours to reserve" (1.5.183).

[79] Barnabe Rich, "Of Two Brethren and their Wives," 258
[80] Ibid, 259.

Chapter 2:

"Think of Us as of a Father": Hamlet's Reformation Interrupted

Early in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the recently crowned King Claudius gives a speech to the Court of Denmark in which he shrewdly maneuvers them from the memory of their late sovereign through a celebration of Claudius' freshly announced marriage with Gertrude and into matters of state regarding the imminent challenge of young Fortinbras. The political situation that Claudius must navigate is especially thorny: not only has King Hamlet died under suspicious circumstances and Claudius orchestrated his own election, but Claudius has also taken the awkward step of making "our sometime sister, now our queen" (1.2.8). Although Claudius's application of the royal plural is conventional speech for the nation's sovereign, its use within this inaugural address is especially significant, since the usurper king strives to imprint his own untroubled narrative of the recent regime change onto the mind of the court, encouraging their transformation into his loyal subjects.[1] Whereas Voltemand, Cornelius, and Laertes accept the transition from Old Hamlet to Claudius without any problem in this scene, the succession is anything but simple for Hamlet, who resents his uncle addressing him as his "son" (64) and cuts Claudius off with the quip, "A little more than kin, and less than kind" (65). Despite the king's best efforts throughout the play, Hamlet never assimilates into Claudius's new order, and as the court disperses in anticipation of the customary "King's rouse" (127), we get the impression that Hamlet is a man on the outside looking in, watching with disgust as Denmark passes him by. But while Hamlet does not welcome the patriarchal influence Claudius wishes to exert over him, neither does the infamous ghost provide Hamlet with stable guidance to navigate the murky state of Denmark. The body of Old Hamlet is dead and buried – in its place is a shade that may bear

[1] On Claudius's shifting use of the royal plural, see David McInnis, "Shakespeare's Hamlet," 70; Patricia H. Ward, "'Witchcraft of His Wits': Claudius' Manipulation of the Arts of Rhetoric," 31.

the king's "fair and warlike form" (1.1.46), but whose nature, and motivations remain questionable to Hamlet, and whose directives the prince famously struggles to enact. Hamlet may be in purgatory, in Greenblatt's sense that the prince inhabits a Shakespearean stage strewn with traces of the controversial doctrine, but it is just as accurate to say that Hamlet is in limbo inasmuch as he is suspended between two father figures throughout the play. Rejecting a satyr-esque, would-be father in Claudius, but lacking his Hyperion-like, actual father in Old Hamlet, the prince's situation recalls those souls in limbo who were suspended between a father of lies and a father in heaven (1.2.140).

Despite Claudius and Gertrude's attempts to facilitate Hamlet's transition into the new regime, the prince is unable to shift his thoughts from the man who has always been his patriarch and sovereign – as he says to Horatio, Hamlet sees his father in his "mind's eye" (1.2.184). David Kastan observes that in making this admission, Hamlet is "acknowledging the psychological hold his dead father still has on him, his father's tenacious presence in an interior space that, throughout the play, Hamlet jealously protects."[2] So long as Old Hamlet's presence remains in the fore of Hamlet's memory, he cannot move forward and follow Claudius's directive to "think of us / As of a father" (107-08). Indeed, Hamlet's withholding this title from Claudius proves a sticking point later in the play; during the closet scene, Gertrude tells him, "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended" (3.4.8) to which he retorts, "Mother, you have my father much offended" (9). Gertrude and Hamlet demonstrate that they are operating within different hermeneutical frameworks here by referencing different people in their use of the word "father" – she is rebuking Hamlet for having disturbed Claudius with the provocative *Murder of*

[2] David Scott Kastan, *A Will to Believe: Shakespeare and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014), 123.

Gonzago, but Hamlet can only think of the late king as his father, and thus from his perspective, the offense lies in Gertrude's perceived infidelity.

While recent criticism of *Hamlet* has emphasized how the passing of Old Hamlet's regime to Claudius's new order is reflective of England's transition into a post-reformation era, it has overlooked how Claudius's urging of Hamlet to move on from his father's death and "think of us / As of a father" (1.2.107-08) resonates with a transfer of paternal authority that was at the center of that transition. Inasmuch as Henry VIII proclaimed royal supremacy over his English subjects, he was, in the view of "papist" English Catholics, attempting to supplant the English Church's spiritual father on earth in the figure of the pope. Just as Claudius attempts to expel both the body and psychological traces of Old Hamlet from the court, so too the assertion of royal supremacy necessitated the physical and ideological extrusion of papal influence from England. In his essay on the Henrician schism, Ethan Shagan offers a vivid example of the pope's erasure from England, relating how, "In 1535, the government ordered that the name of the pope be obliterated from all liturgical books where it appeared; in modern discourse, Henry VIII tried to *disappear* the pope."[3] "At least in the aggregate," he explains, "the government enjoyed considerable success in this unprecedented programme, as can be seen from the countless surviving service books where the word *papa* has been excised."[4] And yet, there were Catholic priests who resisted this command. Some simply ignored the order, and faced arrest for their intransigence; others too left the word *papa* unerased, but opted to cover it in paper as they looked forward to a day when it could again be exposed; one priest merely penned a line through

[3] Ethan Shagan, "Confronting Compromise: The Schism and Its Legacy in Mid-Tudor England," 50.
[4] Ibid, 50-51.

the word *papa*, still leaving it legible. As Shagan relates, however, others took a more radical approach to the text:

> In 1538, for instance, John Lyle, curate of the parish of Wrynkton in Somerset, was repeatedly warned by his parishioners to 'correct and amend his books according to the King's injunctions'. When they investigated they found not only the word *papa* unerased and 'Thomas Beckett's name with his whole legends and stories ... still uncorrected', but also 'these words "*rege nostro*" and this letter "R" blotted out'. In other words, Lyle had defaced the name of the king rather than the name of the pope! This same radical inversion of royal commands was practised by the Cornish priest Andrew Furlong, who had a Bible in his possession whose first three or four leaves were 'cancelled and blotted out in such manner as no man could read the same, but known by the sight of another Bible, which matter so cancelled was in effect the high praise of the king's majesty as supreme head of the Church of England, with other things to his high honour and praise in faith and virtue'.[5]

Lyle and Furlong used ink rather than swords, but their decision to go beyond passive disobedience and strike out against the king in their texts recalls Hamlet's own progression from sullen dissent against Claudius's regime in the play's first act to his open violence against it later. Whether or not Shakespeare himself held any "papist" allegiances, his upbringing in a Catholic home would have instilled in him an awareness that his country's transition from the "old religion" to Elizabeth's state church originated in part out of a clash over who was England's spiritual father,[6] and like other Englishmen at the time, he would have been aware that this issue remained an ongoing conflict. Hamlet's harboring the late king's image in his "mind's eye" (1.2.184) against Claudius's wish that the prince should "think of us / As of a father" (108) speaks primarily, of course, to a son's personal affections for his father and the difficulty he faces in being pressured to replace the irreplaceable. But some English theatergoers would have been

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[5] Ibid, 51-52. On resistance against the order to deface the pope's name from liturgical and devotional books, see Duffy, 416, 418-19; G.R. Elton, *Policy and Police*, 97, 131, 151, 232, 236-38, 291, 364.

[6] Remarking on the significance of the Royal Supremacy, Ethan Shagan asserts that "The centrepiece and actualising principle of the English Reformation was not a theological doctrine, like Luther's justification by faith alone, but an act of state" in *Popular Politics and the English Reformation*, 29.

able to relate to Hamlet's dilemma on another level insofar as it echoed their experience of England's recent religious history. Unable to relinquish filial devotion to their ecclesiastical father even though the pope had been formally discarded by the English crown decades earlier, nonconforming Catholics had essentially been charged by their own government with "impious stubbornness" (94) and pursuing "a will most incorrect to heaven" (95) for not accepting their monarch as the spiritual head of the church. In this sense, *Hamlet* registers the psychic trauma of a nation still dealing with the religious and political fallout that came with this transfer of paternal authority, particularly as these problems were grappled with by disaffected subjects who did not make the transition and the government tasked with the kingdom's security.

In this chapter I trace how the play examines the problem of devotional mutability that English Catholics and the English state both faced once Henry VIII asserted Royal Supremacy and effectively tied his subjects' religion to every successive change of the crown. As the nation vacillated between Catholicism and Protestantism several times within twenty-five years, the state's expectation that English Christians would alter their deepest beliefs (or at least the public performance of those beliefs) to the confessional affiliation of their current sovereign had rendered religious change, to borrow Gertrude's apt phrase, "common" (72). If, as Curran Jr. observes, critics commonly recognize that *Hamlet* "very much concerns itself with the painfulness of the transition from Catholicism to Protestantism,"[7] then I am concerned with how Hamlet's inability to acknowledge Claudius as his "loving father" (4.3.48) and accept the new regime presents a breakdown of that transformation.

In Hamlet's reluctance to neatly assimilate into Claudius's new Denmark, and alternatively, Gertrude's ability to adapt to a world shifting around her, the play recalls elements

[7] John E. Curran Jr. *Hamlet, Protestantism, and the Mourning of Contingency*, 3.

from both the revisionist and post-revisionist models of the English Reformation which emphasize resistance among many of the faithful to the Protestantizing efforts of the Henrician, Edwardian, and Elizabethan regimes as well as the adaptation of outer conformity and the formation of hybrid religious identities. Concomitant with historical accounts of the "Long Reformation" that are increasingly sensitive to the complex confessional identities of early modern English Christians and the tensions between "reformed" and "unreformed" elements within the Church of England itself, the religious questions of *Hamlet* have risen to the fore within scholarly treatment of the play, even as the critical responses have grown more varied. Among those who foreground Shakespeare's probable Catholic upbringing in their readings of the play, for example, John Freeman and Richard Wilson find resonance between Hamlet's alienation and the experience of persecuted Catholics in Tudor England.[8] Alternatively, others highlight elements of reformed theology in the play that were prevalent in English culture, citing what David Daniell calls Shakespeare's "Protestant Inheritance."[9] Jennifer Rust, for instance, argues that Hamlet's melancholy upon returning from Wittenberg has a distinctly Lutheran quality to it, while John Curran Jr. finds Hamlet fighting a losing battle against Calvinist determinism throughout the play.[10] Perhaps more than any other work, *Hamlet* lends credibility to Jean-Chrisophe Mayer's thesis that Shakespeare's drama "self-consciously harbor the old and the new, that they engage with many of the religious issues of their time, but – more

[8] For examples of readings of a Catholic Hamlet, see John Freeman, "This Side of Purgatory: Ghostly Fathers and the Recusant Legacy in *Hamlet*," 222-259; Richard Wilson, *Secret Shakespeare*, 2, 23, 31, 34, 51-52, 89, 94-95; Peter Milward, *The Catholicism of Shakespeare's Plays*, 20-32.
[9] David Daniell, "Shakespeare and the Protestant Mind," 2. See also Hassel, Jr., "Hamlet's 'Too, Too Solid Flesh,'" 609-22; Hassel, Jr., "The Accent and Gait of Christians: Hamlet's Puritan Style," 287-310; Raymond B. Waddington, "Lutheran Hamlet," 27-42; David Kaula, "Hamlet and the Image of Both Churches," 241-55.
[10] Jennifer Rust, "Wittenberg and Melancholic Allegory," 26-86; Curran Jr., *Hamlet, Protestantism, and the Mourning of Contingency*.

fundamentally – that they not only have the power to pose pressing questions but also to allow potential contradictions to remain."[11] In its confused and varied threads of religious discourse, *Hamlet* approximates the fragmented and permeable religious character of England's post-Reformation landscape, which, like the state of Denmark following Old Hamlet's death, can be described as "disjoint[ed] and out of frame" (1.2.20).

While I agree with Freeman, Wilson, Milward, and other critics that there is a strong recusant dimension to Hamlet's character, I want to complicate our understanding of his nonconformity by emphasizing that Hamlet does not resist Claudius's regime from the standpoint of someone who retains the certainties he enjoyed under his father's old order, but as someone whose former assumptions have been shattered. Those assumptions are not just intellectual propositions, but are relational in nature, and they include, for example, Hamlet's youthful assumption that his father would always remain a stable presence in his life, as well as Hamlet's faith in his parents' mutual love. To these we may add Hamlet's belief in a shared love between himself and Ophelia. Like the stars guiding the wandering traveler, these impressions function as fixed points by which Hamlet can form a reliable worldview and reassure himself that some things are not subject to change. As each of these assumptions are overturned, however, Hamlet struggles to discern whether anything in his life can transcend the flux of the natural world. Critics who emphasize the presence of the "old religion" in the play provide compelling readings of how Hamlet's alienation from Claudius's rule dramatizes the experience of disaffected Elizabethan Catholics, but they neglect how the prince's shattered ideals figure

[11] Mayer, 155; Likewise, Mark Matheson notes that "[r]eligious discourse is integral to Hamlet, but Shakespeare's representation of religion in the play is oblique and inconsistent" in "*Hamlet* and 'A Matter Tender and Dangerous,'" 383.

into what Freeman calls the play's "recusant stance."[12] Hamlet may be likened to Catholic recusants in his resistance against Claudius's new Denmark, but what does it mean for such a reading of the play that this new order has undermined the prince's longstanding worldview and forced him to undergo what Alisdair MacIntyre describes as Hamlet's "epistemological crisis"?[13]

For MacIntyre, an individual faces epistemological crisis when he begins to doubt the interpretive frameworks which have hitherto ordered his life experiences or finds that those schemata have led him into error. An epistemological crisis is resolved, MacIntyre goes on to explain, through "the construction of a narrative which enables the agent to understand *both* how he or she could intelligibly have held his or her original beliefs *and* how he or she could have been so drastically misled by them."[14] Here I would suggest we find an apt model for understanding a protestant narrative of reform: once Christians read the Scriptures and discover discrepancies between the Word and the church, the reformers thought, the laity would conclude that they had been deceived by Rome for centuries and would set about recovering true doctrine. As MacIntyre points out, however, an epistemological crisis followed by resolution opens the door for perpetual skepticism towards one's current knowledge.[15] As I will demonstrate in the remainder of this chapter, the disillusionment and skepticism Hamlet experiences as a result of his displaced certainties reflects the dire epistemological consequences that recusant writers set

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[12] Freeman, 245.
[13] See Alisdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," 454. Describing Hamlet's "epistemological crisis," Macintyre observes that "Hamlet's problems arise because the dramatic narrative of his family and of the kingdom of Denmark through which he identified his own place in society and his relationships to others has been disrupted by radical interpretative doubts" (455). I build upon this reading by arguing that the upending of Hamlet's "dramatic narrative of his family and of the kingdom of Denmark" parallels the challenge posed by Protestant reforms in the English Church to Roman Catholic identity.
[14] Ibid, 455.
[15] Ibid.

for themselves should their own worldview be discredited by the reformers. According to Catholic controversialists such as Robert Southwell, Richard Bristow, and Thomas Hill, the Protestant reformers were propagating heresies that were discontinuous with the church's past and inconsistent with each other. If the old religion should be disproven and superseded by Protestantism, they thought, then Christianity would be rendered mutable, subject to the changing fashions and decay as the rest of the world. In their minds, if Catholicism must be given up, then the proper response was not conversion to a reformed model of Christianity, but the discarding of belief altogether. Thus, Catholic proponents frequently argued that the logical end of Protestantism was apathy and then outright atheism. For the recusant writers as well as Hamlet, their belief in something that transcends the vicissitudes of the physical world hinges upon that thing's constancy. Whereas recusant discourse posits transcendence in the Roman Church's consistent doctrine down through the ages, Hamlet locates it in the constancy of personal relationships that defined his experience of Denmark's old order. Hamlet powerfully expresses this in the closet scene, where he tells Gertrude that by marrying Claudius, she has committed "Such an act / That blurs the grace and blush of modesty, / Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose / From the fair forehead of an innocent love / And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows / As false as dicers' oaths" (3.4.38-43). Modesty, virtue, love, innocence, fidelity – Gertrude's marriage to Old Hamlet was one of Hamlet's formative models for these transcendent ideals, and because he perceives Gertrude's remarriage as a breach of her vows, Hamlet experiences loss of confidence in a metaphysical morality.[16] From the point of view of Southwell and his fellow Catholic advocates, the longstanding certainties of traditional religion

[16] As Kenneth Muir puts it, "Hamlet's belief in love and goodness is undermined by the conduct of his mother, but it was because he passionately believed in love that he found Gertrude and Ophelia so far from his ideal" in *The Voyage to Illyria,* 175.

ultimately withstand the Protestant challenge, but in the figure of Hamlet, Shakespeare renders those certainties doubtful. By basing Hamlet's worldview on a strict constancy of relationships that is in collapse from the start, the play positions Hamlet in a liminal space between an old order he finds in ruins and a new regime he finds incomprehensible. In doing so, *Hamlet* lends us insight into the metaphysical consequences that recusant writers believed were at stake should they relinquish traditional religion and submit to the Elizabethan Settlement.

In order to show that Hamlet is caught in a liminal space illustrative of an Elizabethan caught between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism, I first want to highlight how Claudius's ascension to the throne not only involves a seizure of political power, but an assumption of religious authority as well, specifically over the dead. Moreover, I want to bring into focus how the play represents Claudius as imposing these "maimed rites" (5.1.208) out of pure political expediency and in a manner that is inconsistent with what these characters have come to expect following Old Hamlet's reign. In doing so, I wish to underscore how the longing for traditional rites in *Hamlet* can not only be read as a critique of post-Reformation ritual's inability to satisfactorily mediate the living's relationship with the dead, as recent criticism has emphasized, but how it gives voice to a human desire for continuity of practice between past and present which recusant Catholics found lacking under Tudor exercise of royal supremacy.

As Stephen Greenblatt has observed, there is a crisis of mourning in *Hamlet* whereby we find "the disruption or poisoning of virtually all rituals for managing grief, allaying personal and collective anxiety, and restoring order."[17] We see one such breach, for example, when the Ghost complains that it died "Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled" (1.5.77) and consequently faced a terrifying judgment. Claudius arranges for Hamlet to be killed without the sacraments as well,

[17] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 247. On the violation of ceremony in the play, see David Bevington, *Action is Eloquence*, 173-87.

only the prince discovers the plot and reverses it, subjecting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to this fate in his place (5.2.45-47). Additionally, Hamlet's quip that "the funeral baked meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables" (1.2.179-80) expresses his displeasure at the shortened grieving period for his father. Once Laertes returns from France, he is not only enraged by Polonius' suspicious death, but also by his father's "obscure burial" which included "No trophy, sword nor hatchment o'er his bones, / No noble rite, nor formal ostentation" (4.5.206-07). These funerary omissions, he laments, "Cry to be heard as 'twere from heaven to earth" (208). In the case of Ophelia, the Priest is concerned that she may have committed suicide, and thus he would have her deprived of Christian burial. Because of the king's "great command" (217), though, he spares her this treatment.[18] As a result, Ophelia is not laid in "ground unsanctified" (218), but neither is she granted full Christian burial with a requiem (226). Rather, in a manner reminiscent of the Elizabethan Settlement's own middle way, she is given abbreviated rites, prompting Laertes to lament, "Must there no more be done?" (5.1.223). Several times in this play, last rites and funeral ceremonies are curtailed, modified, or withheld entirely, much to the consternation of the dead and their loved ones, who then frequently resort to physical violence as a way of expressing their grief.

[18] Critics have varied in their responses to the priest's denial of full burial rites to Ophelia. Michael MacDonald, for example, demonstrates that Elizabethan civil courts tended to pronounce harsh verdicts when ruling on suicides. See "Ophelia's Maimed Rites," 310-11. In *Catholic Theology and Shakespeare's Plays*, David Beauregard stresses that while Roman Catholic canon law forbade the burial of suicides in "sanctified ground" (a law which the Church of England continued to practice as custom until 1662), there were important qualifications that would have provided Ophelia with Christian burial: "There were obvious distinctions between canon and civil law, and between sane and insane suicides. According to canon law, suicides in their right minds (*felo de se*) were denied burial in consecrated ground, but insane suicides (*non compos mentis*) were allowed such burial" (200, n. 55). Although Beauregard argues that Ophelia deserves full rites owing to what he views as her obvious insanity, he notes that "by virtue of government financial interest, Elizabethan civil courts were harsh and severe in presuming sanity and rendering *felo de se* verdicts" (Ibid).

Examining *Hamlet*'s treatment of mourning within the context of Reformation England's religious culture, several critics have read the play as expressing anxiety towards reformist impulses to diminish the bond between the living and dead that found royal sanction under Tudor monarchs.[19] Daniel Swift, for instance, perceives a reformed sense of mourning in Claudius's opening speech, in which the king offers a token memory of Old Hamlet only to return attention to himself.[20] Similarly, Thomas Rist observes a reformist echo in Claudius's warning that "to persever / In obstinate condolement is a course / Of impious stubbornness" (1.2.92-94), in contrast to which Hamlet's assertion "But I have that within which passeth show" (85) registers a justification for "enlarged performances of funerary remembrance" that is at odds with reformist reductions of ceremonial mourning to empty theatrics.[21] Rist also points out that "Laertes's persistent demand for performances of 'ceremony' for the dead – which the Priest takes to imply 'bell and burial', 'the service of the dead', charitable prayers', and indeed a sung 'requiem' – defy Reformed 'moderation'".[22] Turning to sacramental absolution, Gerard Kilroy finds contemporary religious significance in the Ghost's charge that Claudius left him to die without confession, as well as the bedroom scene where Hamlet seemingly plays a substitute for a priest and admonishes his mother, "Confess yourself to heaven; / Repent what's past, avoid what is to come" (3.4.147-148).[23] Although *Hamlet* is set in pre-Reformation Denmark, *Hamlet*'s marked

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[19] See Daniel Swift, *Shakespeare's Common Prayers*, 140-160; Rist, *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England*, 60-74; Gerard Kilroy, "Requiem for a Prince: Rites of Memory in *Hamlet*," in *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, 143-160.
[20] Swift, 147.
[21] Rist, 61.
[22] Ibid, 72;
[23] Kilroy, 148-149. As Kilroy notes, "Confession was one of the most controversial issues in Elizabethan England, partly because it became an offence after 1570 in an Act providing that 'if any person after the same 1 July should take upon him to absolve or reconcile any person . . . or if any shall willingly receive and take any such absolution or reconciliation' he was guilty of high treason" (148).

deprivation of these sacramental rites and the pronounced longing for them expressed by its characters lend the tragedy a strong topical resonance, one in which *Hamlet*'s own frustrated efforts to mourn the loss of traditional religious ritual and move on from medieval Catholicism results in the cathartic violence of the play's conclusion.

Claudius stands at the center of *Hamlet*'s "maimed rites" (5.1.208), and for this reason, David Beauregard rightly observes an "Erastian dimension" in Claudius's exertion of religious power that would have resonated with English theatergoers.[24] It is worth emphasizing, however, that each time Claudius deprives someone of traditional rites, he does not do so out of some reformed religious principle towards mourning which he wishes to impose on Denmark, but rather because doing so allows him to seize and perpetuate political power for himself. Claudius does not deny Old Hamlet the sacraments because he finds them superstitious, for example, but because he murdered the king in cold blood and it had to be done in secret. Nor can we necessarily say that Claudius uses reformed discourse during his speeches in Act 1, Scene 2, because he genuinely believes his own dictums about what constitutes appropriate grief. Rather, Claudius employs this rhetoric because he is a crafty usurper who wants Hamlet and the court to move on from the former king's death as quickly as possible. Likewise, the "hugger-mugger" burial of Polonius is a failed political calculation Claudius makes in the hope of deflecting public attention away from his advisor's death, so that "the cannon . . . may miss our name / And hit the woundless air" (4.1.42-44). Claudius's role in Ophelia's burial underlines how political advantage is at the core of his treatment of the dead. Although Claudius's "great command" (5.1.217) gains Ophelia abbreviated rites and spares her from being laid "in ground unsanctified" (218) as the Priest would have it, Claudius's intervention should be read within the context of his

[24] Beauregard, 101.

conversation with Laertes in the preceding scene if we are to understand his motive. Once the news of Ophelia's death reaches the court, Claudius complains to Gertrude that he has already taken great pains to temper Laertes's potentially rebellious anger, and now it is likely to erupt again: "How much I had to do to calm his rage! / Now fear I this will give it start again; Therefore let's follow" (4.7.190). Given that Claudius is eager to appease Laertes, his intervention seems less like a newfound appreciation for traditional ritual and more like a political ploy to keep an unstable Laertes under control. Until now Claudius has found it politically beneficial to deprive others of traditional rites, but at this moment, he extends some of them because it is in his interest.

By exercising power over the dying and dead in this *ad hoc* fashion, Claudius engenders the religious instability which beset the English Church under the Tudor exertion of royal supremacy. As "a king of shreds and patches" (3.4.99) in Hamlet's eyes, Claudius embodies this sense of disjuncture, while also recalling the muddled character of the Elizabethan Settlement, a deliberately ambiguous compromise whose papist and puritan critics thought sacrificed religious truth for political expediency and societal stability.[25] In *Hamlet*, Claudius's control over last rites and burial customs results in religion's collapse into the mutability of personal politics, which is a problem that comes to a head in the king's intervention in Ophelia's burial. Claudius may spare Ophelia from being laid "in ground unsanctified" (5.1.218) but this hardly appeases Laertes, who expects a full Christian burial for his sister. In trying to accommodate both the priest and Laertes,

[25] "Discussing the evolution of the Book of Common Prayer beginning with the 1549 version, Swift observes that "The reformation of burial rites was partial and compromised; it stuttered in contradictions and half-done work, a thing of shreds and patches" (148). Concerning the Elizabethan Settlement, J.W. Allen remarked in his classic study of sixteenth-century political thought that "The one positive doctrine essential to and distinctive of the Elizabethan church system was the doctrine of royal supremacy. The Elizabethan church had no defined constitution, form or character" in *A History of Political Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, 180.

Claudius produces an addled, half-measured ceremony that is consistent neither with the unhallowed burial given to suicides adjudged *felo de se* nor the complete rites allowed for those suicides considered *non compos mentis*. Beyond offering a critique of reformed mourning, *Hamlet* is expressing a more fundamental angst towards the instability of the English Church following Henry's declaration of royal supremacy, and through their emotional outbursts towards deprived rites, the play's characters enact the eruptions they feel have severed the present's ties with the past. In this sense, *Hamlet* is a play bursting with the pain of disappointed expectations, from the Ghost bewailing that it died "Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled" (1.5.77), to Ophelia's jarring note that her deceased father "bewept to the ground did *not* go / With true-love showers" (4.5.39-40, emphasis mine).

The most sustained expression of disappointed expectations in *Hamlet* is found, of course, in the prince's disillusionment with his mother, and I now want to look at how the play dramatizes a Catholic critique of Protestant change in its representation of Gertrude's remarriage and the corrosive effects it has on Hamlet's worldview. The profound bewilderment Hamlet expresses towards Gertrude's new marriage suggests he once believed his parents shared an authentic and unchanging love toward one another, a bond immutable and outside of himself that the prince could look to as a point of stability in his life. In his opening soliloquy, after expressing disgust towards the world and his own existence, Hamlet reveals that his distress stems from Gertrude having recently deflated this idealized vision of his parents' love:

> …That it should come to this—
> But two months dead – nay, not so much, not two –
> So excellent a king, that was to this
> Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
> That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
> Visit her face too roughly! Heaven and earth,
> Must I remember? Why, she would hang on him
> As if increase of appetite had grown

By what it fed on…. (1.2.137-145)

Old Hamlet, by the prince's account, was like the Greek sun god in his majesty, possessing power over the elements and indeed using that power to shield his beloved queen from the forces of nature itself. As for Gertrude, Hamlet depicts her as a devoted wife, but renders her affection in the less exalted terms of physical appetite, and rather than remain faithful to her seemingly godlike husband, she has given herself to a figure who, in Hamlet's estimate, is an earthly monster in comparison. "Like Niobe" Gertrude was "all tears" (149) upon the death of Old Hamlet, which is behavior consistent with her devotion to him when he was alive, but "Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears / Had left the flushing of her galled eyes, / She married." (154-56). Given the specific complaints Hamlet voices towards Gertrude in his opening soliloquy – the "most wicked speed" (156) with which she has remarried, the disparity of quality between her former and present husband, and the "incestuous" (157) nature of the relationship – we can surmise the problem Hamlet faces in his mother's remarriage: if Gertrude's devotion towards her husband was as substantial as it seemed, how could it be redirected so quickly after his death, and in a manner that violates the social taboo of consanguinity? If Gertrude found Old Hamlet so appealing, how can she now love someone who is so dissimilar from her former husband? Can love be trusted to be what it seems?

In Sonnet 116, Shakespeare describes an idealized, constant love that approximates the standard Hamlet is holding his mother to in this play:

> . . . love is not love
> Which alters when it alteration finds,
> Or bends with the remover to remove.
> O no, it is an ever-fixed mark,
> That looks on tempests and is never shaken (2-6).

The words “love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds” should remind us of Hamlet’s distinction between *seeming* and *is*. Responding to Gertrude's prodding about why Old Hamlet's death "seems" to have affected Hamlet in such a "particular" (75) way when the rest of the court has moved on, Hamlet snaps at his mother, "'Seems', madam – nay it is, I know not 'seems'" (76). For Hamlet, anyone holding a genuine love of his late father would continue to express that love, at the least, through observing an appropriate mourning period. The "forms, moods, [and] shapes of grief" (82) Hamlet has taken up cannot begin to express his sense of loss, but since the "trappings and the suits of woe" (86) are the only means Hamlet has available to express his mourning, he is determined to keep using them. In this way, he is asserting to Gertrude that at this moment, he *is* what he *seems* – a son who is profoundly broken over the loss of his father. By insisting "I know not 'seems'" to his mother, Hamlet asserts his differentiation from Gertrude, whose previous expressions of love for his father Hamlet now judges as fraudulent. For both the speaker of Sonnet 116 and Hamlet, what merely seems like love, but in fact is not the genuine article, is “love” that varies over time. In contrast, true love is defined by its constancy in the face of change. Love encounters “alteration” in the world that pressures it to change with the circumstances, but as “an ever-fixed mark” love rises above temporal conditions and touches that which is eternal. When placed under pressure, false love reveals itself as an earthly substance, or as the sonnet goes on to say, “Time’s fool,” (9) whereas true love proves itself otherworldly.

In the prologue to *The Murder of Gonzago*, a play Hamlet has chosen for performance because it depicts "something like" (2.2.530) his father's murder, the Player Queen articulates a profession of faithfulness that reflects Sonnet 116's vision of fidelity. Whether or not the Player Queen's lines include the "some dozen lines, or sixteen lines" (475) Hamlet requests to be

inserted into the script, his passionate reaction to her vow ("If she should break it now!") and use of it to provoke a response in Gertrude ("Madam, how like you this play?") suggests that Hamlet sees the Player Queen and his mother as one and the same (3.2.218, 223). Within the prologue the couple have been married for thirty years, and the issue becomes whether their love will prove to transcend the world's mutability or if will be led by fortune's changing circumstances.[26] In response to the mere suggestion that she may find a new husband once the Player King passes away, the Player Queen asserts that she would be guilty of "treason" (172) and the murder of her husband if she were to remarry.[27] Although the Player King assures her that he believes she is sincere in making this profession of loyalty, he goes on to express skepticism towards his wife's claim, not because of some particular defect in her, but because "Purpose is but the slave to memory" (182). Vows made passionately necessarily lose their resolution as time goes by, he explains, and as our fortunes and the circumstances of life change, it should not surprise us that our loves will as well (188-95). This exhortation only arouses greater determination in the Player Queen, though, who calls destruction down on her own head should she ever take a second husband. As Kehler observes, the Player Queen's forceful profession that she will remain celibate in her widowhood evokes the traditional Catholic aversion toward remarriage, which is an attitude that remained dominant within early modern English culture despite many reformed

[26] On the opposition between Wisdom and Fortune in *Hamlet*, see Roland Mushat Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet*, 111-31.

[27] The charge of "treason" initially calls to mind the accusation that the English government hurled at recusants in their refusal to attend the new religious service. In saying that she would be committing treason if she gives up her old husband and embraces a new one, though, the Player Queen turns the state's charge of treason on its head, recalling Robert Southwell's judgment in *An epistle of comfort* that to attend the state church is an act of treason against Christ's Church, of whom Christ is the sovereign (170).

clerics and polemicists advocating for widows to remarry.[28] Curran finds an additional shade of religious controversy in the contrast between the Player Queen's confidence that she can remain celibate after her husband's death, which Curran argues is indicative of a "Catholic" freedom of the will, and the "Calvinist" sense of inevitability that pervades the Player King's prediction of her remarriage.[29] While Kehler and Curran's insights contribute to our understanding of how remarriage is associated with Protestantism in this play inasmuch as reformed clerics encouraged widows to find new spouses, scholarship has overlooked how Hamlet and the Player Queen's objections against remarriage share a discourse of constancy with Roman Catholic polemicists who were critiquing what they perceived to be Protestantism's protean nature and discontinuity with Christianity's past. In apprehending how Hamlet's dissent parallels not just Catholic aversion to remarriage but to Protestantism as a whole, we attain a broader understanding of how Claudius's reign resonates with England's own transformation into a reformed nation while also gaining greater explanatory power for the epistemic collapse Hamlet experiences in reaction to Gertrude's new marriage.

By exploring the problem of shifting devotion, Hamlet speaks to an issue of central concern to early modern English Catholics in their resistance to Protestantism, especially as

[28] See Dorothea Kehler, *Shakespeare's Widows*, 2, 7-8, 10, 24; on the general association of widowed celibacy with Catholicism and remarriage with Protestantism, see Lila Geller, "Widows' Vows and *More Dissemblers Besides Women*," 291-96. For the dissenting view among social historians that remarriage was viewed as acceptable in early modern England, see Alan Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England*, 234-36 and Miriam Slater, *Family Life in the Seventeenth Century*, 104-07.
[29] Curran Jr., 181.

those concerns are expressed in recusant discourse.[30] Like much of the period's religious polemic, recusant tracts frequently opt for caustic invective against Protestantism and conformity with the national church rather than careful, systematic critique. And yet, it is for this very reason that recusant complaints resonate so poignantly with those of Hamlet, who, for all of his vaunted reasoning, just as often allows his emotions to carry him away into outright demonization of Gertrude and Claudius. For these Roman Catholic writers, the true church had to be able to produce a pedigree of unchanging belief from the apostolic age to the present day, and while they present their own faith as essentially continuous since the time of Christ, they capitalize on the recent nature of Protestant reform and its diversity of beliefs to portray it as the latest manifestation of a heretical spirit that remains constant only in its inconstancy. Catholicism's permanence and Protestantism' variability is a central theme in Robert Southwell's *Epistle of Comfort,* for example, in which he characterizes the former as "neuer touched with variablenesse, change, or contrarietye in essential poyntes of beliefe" (79) and decries the latter as full of "vnconftancye, varietye, and fodeyne chaunge".[31] By reiterating Catholicism's fixity throughout the treatise, Southwell gives his readers an ideal to embody as he encourages their own steadfastness in the faith. To this end, he highlights the biblical martyr Stephen, "Whofe example maybe be vnto vs a paterne of conftacye, & teache vs to make the fame account of the obliquyes of our aduerfaries, that he did of the malice of the Iewes."[32] In *Quartron of Reasons of*

[30] For both Roman Catholics and Protestants alike in this period, it was generally assumed that religious truth was immutable and not subject to revision, owing to its reflection of a metaphysical reality and unchanging divinity. Both Catholics and Protestants abhorred novelty and viewed themselves as defending Christ's original gospel, but whereas Protestants were convinced the gospel had become obscured over time by human corruption and needed recovery, Catholics claimed that the institutional church had never failed to preserve the true faith and argued for a continuity of belief from the apostolic age up through the Council of Trent.
[31] Southwell, *An epistle of comfort,* 78, 81.
[32] Ibid, 10.

Catholike Religion, too, Thomas Hill lists "Constancie in Doctrine" as one proof of his church's religious truth, claiming that "The Doctrine of the Romaine Church hath euer remained settled, and stated without chaunge or innouation, hosoeuer time euer fleeting, altereth many thinges to disaduantage".[33] After boasting that the Roman church has remained faithful to Christ's teachings despite being subjected to the pressures of time and its fluctuating circumstances, Hill chastises what he sees as the fickleness of the reformation project:

> But cotrariwise the Protestantes beginning but some fiftie or threescore yeares agoe, haue in this small time so chopped & chaunged, so altered, and transformed theyr Religion, as you may well sayt Proteus, in regard of them to be constant in shape: wherein they shew themselues like theyr Fathers the old Heretikes, who also in inconstancy of doctrine were very notable: and no meruaile, for when they be once foorth of the right waie, they take euerie pathe which offereth it selfe unto them, but neuer can happen vpon the right way againe, except they goe backe from whence they came, but runne ful further, and further out of the way, euer learning, but neuer comming to the knowledge of the Trueth.[34]

Hill's remark that once heretics stray from "the right waie, they take euerie pathe which offereth it selfe unto them" demonstrates the capricious quality he finds in Protestantism, whose adherents Hill believes will continually embrace any new belief offered to them now that they have abandoned the bride of Christ. For Hill, the Book of Common Prayer's volatile revisions serve as an example of the English Church's own unique instability since Henry assumed religious authority:

> And I pray you what a chaunging, and turning in and out was there of your Communion Book? For first the deuisers thereof highly commended it, and affirmed it to be agreeable to Christs institution, & to the seruice of the Primitiue Church; and a while after they vtterly misliked it, and disauthorising it, they set foorth another in principall pointes quite contrary to the former, & yet they affirmed that also to be according to Christs institution, & jump as the vse was in the Primitive Church.[35]

[33] Thomas Hill, *A quartron of reasons of Catholike religion*, 92.
[34] Ibid, 94.
[35] Ibid, 96-97.

Hill's description fits what Carier would call a "plain change" in the Church of England's faith, in which it would come to condemn practices and beliefs that it once lauded. The results of the Prayer Book's revisions and reversals have been chaos, Hill notes, as ministers perform the rite in different ways and the laity take sides. And yet, Hill concludes, there can only be "inconstancie in Doctrine" within Protestantism, since its *raison d'etre* is "advantage, and disadvantage" – that is, it is a religion "framed only to serue turnes, & times".[36]

Richard Bristow criticizes Protestantism along similar lines as Hill, insisting that "the Romains neuer chaunged theyr Religion" and mocking England's "parlament church" for the "absurdities" he claims would have to be accepted if its tenets were followed.[37] If Peter the apostle was now living in England, Bristow argues, he would have to give up his evangelical commission and submit himself to England's monarch, while Augustine would be fined for saying mass on behalf of his mother's soul.[38] If Christ himself had chosen contemporary England to enact his salvific mission, Bristow points out that he would have been compelled "to haue held his peace and leaft his medling like a Foreiner as hee was, and in no wise to haue behaued him-selfe like the Head of his owne Church, vnlesse hee would haue also saied, that he had bene the natural king of England, and displaced the lawfull heires of the Kings afore-time".[39] Indeed, Bristow asserts that as a logical result of the royal supremacy, when Pilate asked Christ if he was a king, Christ would have had to answer "My Kingdome is of this world, and thy Maister Cesar doth me wrong."[40] Bristow explains: "This must hee needed haue done (I say) by our new mens doctrine, or not haue bin Head of his Church, because by their saying that Headship cannot be

[36] Ibid, 98.
[37] Richard Bristow, *A briefe treatise of diuerse plaine and sure waies*, 100, 157.
[38] Ibid, 157.
[39] Ibid, 158.
[40] Ibid.

seperated from the Kingship, being (as they say) a real naturall, and an essentiall part thereof."[41] In tying the head of the church to the monarchy and reforming its doctrine, Bristow believes, the Church of England was relinquishing its supernatural character and descending into a merely human institution that is susceptible to time's fluctuations and dissolution.

Within the discourse of recusant Catholic polemics, Protestantism represented religious contradiction and life in a senseless universe, one in which there are no permanent truths to stand on because beliefs that were long assumed to be transcendent turned out to be purely temporal. In his skeptical response to the Player Queen's vow of perpetual fidelity, the Player King envisions a comparable world of pure temporality, as he tells her that the devotion she so passionately believes in will prove short-lived: "This world is not for aye, nor 'tis not strange / That even our loves should with our fortunes change" (3.2.194-95). For the Player King, all "wills" and "devices" have a breaking point and will succumb to change given the right conditions or external pressure (205-206). "So think thou wilt no second husband wed / But die thy thoughts when thy first lord is dead," he tells his wife, firmly grounding her professed love within the same worldly flux as his dying body (208-209).

In the closet scene, the discontinuity between the old and new regimes erupts as Hamlet sets pictures of Old Hamlet and Claudius before Gertrude, urging her to acknowledge what he sees as their stark differences. Hamlet believes that by confronting the contrast between the two pictures, Gertrude will have to face her own conscience, that "glass" that shows her "inmost part" (3.4.18-19). Hamlet tells Gertrude what he thinks she *should* be seeing in these images, directing her to look on her former husband and "See what a grace was seated on this brow, / Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself" (53-54). In language reminiscent of the terms he uses in his

[41] Ibid.

opening soliloquy, Hamlet again idealizes his father: "A combination and a form indeed / Where every god did seem to set his seal / To give the world assurance of a man" (58-60). "This was your husband. Look you now what follows" Hamlet says, and he runs down Claudius in increasingly spiteful terms, from "a mildewed ear / Blasting his wholesome brother" (62-63) to "a vice of kings" (96). Gertrude has undoubtedly seen these pictures before, but what makes Hamlet's stirring of her conscience so effective here is that he places them directly opposite one another, and just as important, he shapes Gertrude's impression of them by verbally interpreting the pictures for her.

In his *Treatise of schisme*, the Catholic writer Gregory Martin treats the issue of attending Protestant services as spiritual adultery, reminding his readers that Christ is the "Spouse wedded to our soule: And therfore can not abide . . . an aduoulterer together with him in the fame bed."[42] In Hamlet's juxtaposition of the old king's picture against the new so as to move Gertrude to repent and refrain from sleeping with Claudius, the prince draws on a rhetorical tactic employed by recusant writers trying to move their readers' consciences away from conformity and into a recusant stance.[43] Hill frequently relies on this strategy, rendering his own faith in glowing terms and directing his reader to consider it against what Hill perceives as the inferiority of Protestantism. For example, while discussing the issue of church unity, he says:

> But whofoever they be, or in what place, or region foeuer they remain in al the world, if they be catholikes or papifts (if you will call the fo) they all haue one Faith, one Beleefe, one Seruice, one number of Sacraments, one Obedience, one Iudgement in all, with other like pointes of Vnion, and Vnitie, which maketh a generall uniformitie alfo in the peace of mens mindes, and to be briefe they haue all one heart, and one foule: but on the other fide, if you look into the doinges of Proteftantes, you shall fee such difcentions, such

[42] Gregory Martin, *A treatise of schisme,* Bi.
[43] Gregory Martin uses this back-and-forth approach in *The loue of the soule,* whereby he sets out what he considers to be several markers of the true church and subsequently asks his readers to contrast them with the state of the English Church, which he depicts in as unfavorable a light as possible.

> diuifions, fuch fchifmes, fuch contrariety of opinions as the like was neuer among . . . the most iarring Heretikes that euer were.[44]

Lest the stark contrast Hill wants to impress on his reader is somehow overlooked, he bluntly declares: "This Vnitie of CATHOLICKES, and difcorde of PROTESTANTES, moft manifeftlie sheweth."[45] Likewise, when he addresses the differences in lifestyle between Catholics and Protestants, Hill claims:

> Nowe it cannot be but moft plaine to euery one, who knoweth both, that the liues of Catholikes, in all landes, and that in all ages, and namely of our aunceftours, and predeceffours there in Englande were, & alfo of thofe who now be, for the moft part moft Holy, moft Innocent, moft Religious, and moft Godly: and the liues of the Proteftantes ordinarilye moft lewde, loofe, and voide of piety.[46]

In an additional parallel to Hamlet, who finds the contrast between his father and Claudius so obvious that he questions Gertrude's senses (76-79), Hill believes the differences between England's Catholic past and its Protestant present are self-evident. Hill's hyperbolic rhetoric in this passage further underscores the polemical nature of recusant discourse that is mirrored in the prince's caustic reaction to his mother's new marriage, and this belligerence can also found in how recusant writers and Hamlet each assign base motives to those they feel have betrayed them. Freeman observes that just as recusant polemicists depicted "church papists" as practical hedonists whose desire for material pleasure outweighed their commitment to the old faith, so too "Gertrude's falling off from Hamlet's father is associated with materialist and hedonistic impulses."[47] According to this reading, Hamlet and the Ghost's disdain toward Gertrude reflects the recusant scorn towards those Catholics who outwardly conformed to state religion and "chose

[44] Thomas Hill, *A quartron of reasons of Catholike religion*, 11-12.
[45] Ibid, 14.
[46] Ibid, 81.
[47] Freeman, 247.

a more comfortable compliance with the powers-that-be."[48] I want to expand on Freeman's observation here and then briefly consider how Shakespeare represents the complexities of conformity more broadly in Gertrude's character.

In addition to the recusant portrayal of church papists as hedonists that Freeman emphasizes, we should remember that recusant Catholic writers considered conformists as accomplices to heresy and viewed conforming parents as guilty of "paricidiall impiety" against their children, whose presence at common prayer they often permitted or coerced.[49] This familial dimension is active in Gertrude's marriage to Claudius, the scandal her marriage gives to Hamlet, and Gertrude's efforts to assimilate her son into the new regime. If Claudius's rule is associated with an Erastian exertion of religious power that imposes maimed rites upon its subjects, Gertrude's early attempt to persuade Hamlet to cast off his grief demonstrates the queen's own complicity with Claudius's regime and his reformed rites. Claudius may not receive the kingship directly through Gertrude since he has been elected to the position, but his marriage to her certainly consolidates his claim. Through her swift remarriage, Gertrude is instrumental in the shortened mourning allotted for Old Hamlet, as well as the inappropriate mixing of "mirth in funeral" and "dirge in marriage" (12) that has ushered in Claudius's reign, one in which the proper ordering of grief and celebration have been twisted "out of joint" (1.5.186). As Swift observes, when Gertrude implores Hamlet to remember that "all that lives must die, / Passing through nature to eternity" (1.2.72-73) she is using language similar to the rhetoric Claudius draws upon in his opening speech, and which echoes the consoling language found in the first

[48] Ibid.
[49] On the recusant view of conformists as abetting the spread of heresy, as well as conformist parents giving scandal to their children, see Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists*, 28-29, 36.

Book of Homilies and the Book of Common Prayer.[50] In imploring Hamlet to "not for ever with thy vailed lids / Seek for thy noble father in the dust" (70-71) Gertrude's words are doing double duty: by encouraging Hamlet to acknowledge loyalty to Claudius, Gertrude implicitly prods her son to adapt a reformed sense of mourning – indeed, the former requires the latter.

In contrast to Freeman, however, I submit that Shakespeare's depiction of Gertrude and how she is perceived by Hamlet resonates not only with "church papists" who outwardly conformed to the English church, but also with those Christians who were convinced of state Protestantism. In addition to the fact that charges of hedonism were not just made by recusants against "church papists" but by Catholics against Protestants as well, the chief reason Gertrude can be read as more broadly paralleling the English church in this way lies in the ambiguity of Gertrude's interior life and why she married Claudius.[51] Gertrude very well may be driven by sensuality in her relationship with Claudius, as Freeman posits, but such a reading depends on how much we credit Hamlet and the Ghost's perception of Gertrude as lascivious.[52] Rebecca

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[50] Swift, 144-45.

[51] In their polemical literature, Catholics regularly associated the acceptance of reformed doctrine with licentiousness. In a 1600 pamphlet attributed to Thomas Wright, for example, the author devotes his fourth chapter to arguing that Protestants "tend to loofenes of life and carnal libertie" (B6). If a Christian believes that faith alone ensures salvation, Wright asks, "why may he not wallowe in all licencious pleafures in this life, & neuer doubt of glory in the other? Could ever *Epicurus* have founde a better grounde to plant his Epicurifme?" (B7). See Thomas Wright, *Certain articles or forcible reasons*. Likewise, when Hamlet castigates Gertrude for abiding "in the rank sweat of an enseamed bed / Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love / Over the nasty sty" (3.4.90-92) he is portraying her in terms similar to the crude imagery used by Richard Bristow in *A briefe treatise of diuers plaine and sure waies* when he denounces Protestants as "carnall swine that wallow in sinne" and "wanton women, that in this world serve their lustes, both at borde, and in bed" (152).

[52] That Shakespeare relegates Gertrude's supposed sensuality to the mouths of her detractors is revealing when contrasted against *Titus Andronicus*'s queen of the goths, Tamora, whose own speech expresses her lust for Aaron in no uncertain terms. Shakespeare is not remiss in having a character's words demonstrate a lascivious personality when he wants to make a point about it, so the fact that we do not find it in Gertrude's own speech suggests the playwright may not want to make it as straightforward a matter as Hamlet and the Ghost do.

Smith has pointed out that the longstanding view that the queen remarried out of lust derives from an uncritical acceptance of remarks made by male characters who believe Gertrude has wronged them and are not necessarily unbiased observers.[53] Reminding us that remarried widows were frequently stereotyped as licentious in early modern England, Dorothea Kehler describes Gertrude and the Gertred of the First Quarto as "widows whose lust resides not in their lines but in the eyes of the beholders."[54] Gertrude's discernment of "black and grieved spots" in her "soul" (3.4.88-89) after Hamlet rebukes her may confirm such a reading, but as Smith points out, Gertrude does not make clear to what those spots are referring, whether "if it is a newly aroused awareness of her adulterate and incestuous relationship, if it is her marriage to a man whom Hamlet so clearly despises, or if it is merely her already lamented o'erhasty marriage."[55] Because Gertrude expresses a troubled conscience in response to Hamlet's tirade against her relationship with Claudius, we can conclude that at least some part of his diatribe has hit home, but she does not say which aspect. Even during her one aside in the play, just before she confronts the mad Ophelia, Gertrude does not reveal the nature of the "guilt" (4.5.19) that afflicts her. Instead of marrying out of lust for Claudius, Gertrude may have done so in order to retain some degree of political influence, not unlike those Catholics who outwardly conformed in order to retain government posts. On the other hand, Gertrude may have remarried out of a genuine love of Claudius, as Maurice Hunt has suggested.[56] Such a motivation does not reflect the mentality of "church papists" who feigned state religion while retaining the old faith in their hearts, but rather those who sincerely embraced the English Church. Given Gertrude's opaque

[53] Rebecca Smith, "A Heart Cleft in Twain: The Dilemma of Shakespeare's Gertrude," 194-210, esp. 200-201.
[54] Kehler, 15.
[55] Smith, 203.
[56] Maurice Hunt, "Gertrude's Interiority," 13-27.

interiority, Richard Levin's thesis remains the most plausible, which is that Shakespeare suggests conflicting motives behind Gertrude's remarriage throughout the play.[57] In doing so, Shakespeare evokes a range of motives that Elizabethans had for adopting an outer conformity, if not an inner conversion, to state religion. Through the sheer force of Hamlet's and the Ghost's condemnation of Gertrude, the play seems to be focusing on the queen's alleged wantonness, but by relegating her purported lasciviousness to the mouths of others rather than showing it to us in her words and behavior onstage, *Hamlet* is actually directing us to reflect on her accusers and their allegations. In this respect, the play begins showing the limits of its empathy towards the Catholic critique of religious change under royal supremacy. *Hamlet* powerfully expresses the rationale for recusant Catholic refusal through the prince's discontent towards Claudius's rule and Gertrude's new marriage, but by maintaining an elusive posture towards *why* the queen has remarried, the play distances itself from demonizing the intentions of those who attended state religious services, showing that it does not presume to "pluck out the heart" of their "mystery" (3.2.357-58).

In coming to terms with his disappointed ideals, Hamlet must face the possibility that his world is no different than the one posited by the Player king, which is purely natural with no connection to transcendence.[58] Shakespeare emphasizes this point by setting Hamlet's ideals of constancy against a backdrop of shifting change throughout the play, some examples of which I would like to briefly illuminate. Consider, for instance, the exchange between Hamlet and

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[57] Richard Levin, "Gertrude's Elusive Libido and Shakespeare's Unreliable Narrators," 308.

[58] Here we can find similarity between the Player King's vision, the Catholic recusant view of Protestantism, and Michel de Montaigne's description of pure temporality. In such a world, he writes, "there is no existence that is constant, either of our being or of that of objects. And we, and our judgment, and all mortal things go on flowing and rolling unceasingly. Thus nothing certain can be established about one thing by another, both the judging and the judged being in continual change and motion." See Michel de Montaigne, "Apology for Raymond Sebond," 455. Montaigne's view that Catholic tradition provides a stabilizing force in a world of change and uncertainty is relevant to our study when we consider that *Hamlet* is wrestling with the dimming of England's Catholic past.

Rosencrantz concerning the players' arrival in Elsinore. Responding to Hamlet's query about why these once-popular "tragedians of the city" (2.2.292) are now on tour, Rosencrantz tells him that traditional acting companies have been displaced by "the late innovation" (296). Rosencrantz clarifies this point in the First Folio, alluding to the contemporary war of the theatres and the current popularity of children's companies. Hamlet recognizes the ironic circularity of the situation, and points out that the child actors may find themselves in demand now, but they will grow up to become the same "common players" they are superseding. Using the inconstancy of audience tastes as a comparison point for the fickleness of Danish loyalty, Hamlet remarks that the same people who ridiculed his uncle while Old Hamlet was king are now willing to pay upwards of a hundred ducats for a small portrait of Claudius (300-303). Shakespeare thus drives home the ubiquity of worldly change by pointing out those in his audience who change their theatrical tastes and engage in political temporizing.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's duplicity stands as an additional example of how mutability invades every aspect of Hamlet's world. Although Claudius summons the pair to Elsinore so that he can take advantage of their longstanding friendship with Hamlet and find out why the prince is acting so strange, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern prove to be poor players, nothing like the professional actor that later impresses Hamlet with his life-like speech. Cutting through their lame plea that the two are merely paying him a friendly visit, Hamlet entreats his friends to tell him the truth in the name of that fidelity which has hitherto defined their friendship – as he says, "by the rights of our fellowship, by the constancy of our youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved love" (2.2.250-52). The pair continue to dither, and Hamlet only manages to wring the truth from them once he appeals to their love for him (256-57). The damage has been done, though. Had the two taken the initiative from the start and told Hamlet they had been sent

for, Hamlet may have been impressed by their loyalty and opened up to them. As matters stand, they have proven that Hamlet cannot trust them more than “adders fanged” (3.4.201), and his judgment is confirmed in their willingness to continue acting as Claudius’s dull instruments up to their death. Any fellowship they may have shared with Hamlet in the past may now be questioned as simply a means for their own opportune advantage, and now that Claudius has pressured them to betray their friend’s confidence, they easily follow where fortune directs them. As he tells Rosencrantz, Hamlet now considers his friend a mere “sponge” that “soaks up the King’s countenance, his rewards, his authorities.” (4.2.13-15). In Hamlet's eyes, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are defined by their surroundings, never showing agency themselves and always acted upon by others. If Horatio's stoic loyalty to Hamlet within Denmark's patronage economy secures him the prince's "election" (3.2.60) and privilege of being "sealed" (61) with Hamlet's favor,[59] Rosencrantz and Guildenstern's duplicity earn them his condemnation in the form of their "sudden death, / Not shriving time allowed" (5.2.46-47), the order for which is "sealed" (47) by Old Hamlet's signet-ring.

Like the “too too sallied flesh” that the prince wishes “would melt, Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,” (1.2.129-30) Hamlet’s former ideals dissolve into the play’s protean climate once they become tainted. In such a shifting world, nothing can be expected to last, and all surface appearances inevitably conceal a very different interior. These conditions engender a cynicism that spreads throughout the play and soon poisons Hamlet and Ophelia’s relationship. Even as Gertrude’s remarriage brings out in Hamlet a misogynist distrust of all women that makes him cry out, “Frailty thy name is Woman” (146), Laertes and Polonius each present a case

[59] On Horatio's client-patron relationship with Hamlet, see András Kiséry, *Hamlet's Moment*, 161-66. As Kiséry points out, Horatio's consistent devotion to his patron eventually pays off at the end of the play when Hamlet gives him "the task of inviting the conqueror to the throne: an office that does not necessarily bode ill for a courtier at the beginning of a new reign" (162).

to Ophelia for her to doubt Hamlet's professed love. For Laertes, Hamlet and Ophelia's differences in social position precludes Hamlet's love from being anything more than "the perfume and suppliance of a minute" (9). In a speech that resonates with the Player King's later exhortations about how easily strong intentions wilt in the face of adverse circumstances, Laertes reminds his sister that "now no soil nor cautel doth besmirch / The virtue of his will, but you must fear, / His greatness weighed, his will is not his own" (15-18). In time, Hamlet will be pressured to find a match suitable to his position as prince, someone acceptable to "the voice and yielding of that body / Whereof he is the head" (21-23). Laertes points out that marrying for love is hardly possible for the prince's station, and therefore Ophelia should temper her belief in Hamlet's love, since he will not be able to follow through on his professions. If Ophelia should embrace Hamlet's advances, she will inevitably be used and discarded by him, losing her virtue to his "unmastered importunity" (31). "Fear it, Ophelia, fear it, my dear sister," (32) Laertes says, and after describing how youthful passions are highly vulnerable to destruction, he boils his advice down to a somber warning: "Be wary then: best safety lies in fear, / Youth to itself rebels, though none else near" (41-42). Laertes' admonition is meant to induce dread in Ophelia at the thought that Hamlet may rob her of her honor, but his words "best safety lies in fear" (42) stand as an apt approach to a world that is constantly shifting and in which appearances and reality are so disjointed. Trusting another person over trusting oneself is a sensible risk only in a world where constancy and transparency are possible.

As Polonius delivers his own lecture to Ophelia censuring her relationship with Hamlet, he repeatedly frames Hamlet's advances as nothing more than the empty gestures of someone trying to entice his daughter. On the one hand, Ophelia confesses that Hamlet has "made many tenders Of his affection" (1.3.98-99) to her, "importuned [her] with love In honourable fashion"

(109-110) and, indeed, "given countenance to his speech . . . With almost all the holy vows of heaven" (112-13). Playing upon Ophelia's own language, Polonius argues that there is a difference between Hamlet's words and his intentions. Warning his daughter that Hamlet's "tenders" are not "true pay" (105), Polonius seizes upon her word "fashion" (111) to describe Hamlet's actions, and dismisses the prince's vows as mere "springes to catch woodcocks" (114). Like the customary "suits of woe" (1.2.86) that Hamlet wears in mourning for his father while claiming that he has "that within which passes show" (85), the pressing question here is whether Hamlet's feelings for Ophelia transcend the conventional performance he is offering Ophelia. Does Hamlet's reliance on fashion in wooing Ophelia mean that there must be nothing more than fashion behind his actions?

In his letter to Ophelia, Hamlet tells her "Doubt truth to be a liar, / But never doubt I love" (2.2.116-17) but he gives us ample room to doubt it in the play, and at times he appears to doubt it himself. In trying to understand the disturbing visit Hamlet pays to Ophelia, we can read his disheveled appearance as a manifestation of the "antic disposition" (1.5.170) he has put on, but there seems to be more going on here. Hamlet has already expressed his loss of faith in women, and Ophelia's proximity to Polonius likely makes Hamlet even more hesitant to let her in on the Ghost's revelation. I find Northop Frye persuasive in his suggestion that when Hamlet takes Ophelia by the wrist and studies her face, he is making one last effort to discern if he can trust her with what he has learned about his father's death.[60] In my view, though, Frye perceives only half of what is at stake for Hamlet in this moment. Ophelia relates that after Hamlet examined her face, "He raised a sigh so piteous and profound / As it did seem to shatter all his bulk / And end his being." (2.1.91-93). Hamlet's sigh is an expression not just of his

[60] Northop Frye, *Northop Frye on Shakespeare*, 91-92.

disappointment that he cannot trust Ophelia with his secret, but his loss of belief in Ophelia's goodness and their mutual love. Ophelia recently cut off communication with Hamlet according to her father's orders, and however unfairly, this denial likely confirmed the doubts Hamlet starts feeling towards Ophelia after his mother's remarriage. Hamlet's sigh "did seem to shatter all his bulk /And end his being" (92-93) because in losing faith in his and Ophelia's love, a significant part of Hamlet's world and his own identity are being destroyed.

Hamlet and Ophelia's break becomes decisive when she attempts to return several love tokens to him and he lashes out at her. In reaction to Hamlet's physical "remembrances" (3.1.92) being returned to him, Hamlet returns his own figurative "remembrances" of their relationship back to Ophelia, as he denies that he ever gave her such gifts (95) and recalls his love for her only to denounce it, telling her, "I loved you not" (118). Later, as he wrestles with Laertes at Ophelia's gravesite, Hamlet reverses himself again and exclaims, "I loved Ophelia – forty thousand brothers / Could not with all their quantity of love / Make up my sum." (5.1.258-60). Considering Hamlet's inconsistent treatment of Ophelia up to this point, it is hardly clear how we should take his words here. What is clear, though, is that despite the triumphant force of his self-assertions here, Hamlet himself has come to embody the very inconstancy he despises.

In Hamlet's inability to accept Gertrude's remarriage and acknowledge Claudius as his "loving father" (4.3.49), the play draws dramatic capital from the experience of recusant Catholics who found themselves unable to come to terms with the post-Reformation English Church. For Hamlet as well as the recusants, the problem entails being unable to find consistency where one perceives glaring inconsistency, or in other words, of being unable to square the circle in one's mind and heart. What Gertrude and Claudius are essentially asking of Hamlet is that he should believe Gertrude could have loved (and likely *still* loves) Old Hamlet even while she now

shares the marriage bed with Claudius. They are also asking him to believe that Claudius could replace Old Hamlet as a paternal figure in the prince's life, even though Hamlet considers Claudius "no more like my father / Than I to Hercules" (1.2.152-53). Like the recusant writers, Hamlet holds a principle of strict constancy as his standard for determining whether anything in his world can transcend time's mutability and decay, but that ideal becomes a grave liability for Hamlet as the world around him changes. For while the play acknowledges the principled stance taken by recusant Catholics against state religion, Shakespeare also shows us the bind that the English government was being placed in by nonconformists.

If Hamlet is faced with an epistemological crisis, Claudius is confronted with a political one in the prince's resistance to Denmark's new *status quo* advanced in Claudius's opening speech. Gertrude's plea for Hamlet to "cast thy nighted colour / And let thine eye look like a friend on Denmark" (1.2.68-69) discloses the political import of her son's disconsolation. Since Claudius now represents Denmark, Hamlet's nonconforming "obstinate condolement" (93) marks him out as someone who does not seem to accept Claudius's governing authority, and hence, he can be viewed as an enemy to the state. This was, of course, the logic which the Elizabethan regime took in associating Roman Catholicism with treason, as it forced Catholic recusants to choose between allegiance to their pope or to their monarch. In 1570, this problem became compounded after Pope Pius V excommunicated and deposed Elizabeth in *Regnans in Excelsis*, wherein he also released Elizabeth's subjects from obedience to her, commanding that they "not dare obey her orders, mandates and laws" or otherwise they are included "in the like sentence of excommunication."[61] As for Hamlet, he may express attachment to his father at the beginning of the play and resentment towards Claudius, but he expresses no reason nor desire to act against

[61] Pope Pius V, "Regnans in Excelsis," par. 5

the new king until he encounters the Ghost, whose Senecan demand for revenge, to quote Greenblatt, sets in motion "a nightmare that will eventually destroy not only his usurping brother but also Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Gertrude, and his own son."[62] In his discussion of the Ghost, Greenblatt connects its desire for remembrance to Thomas More's *Supplication of Souls* and other polemics addressing the issue of Purgatory, while also reading the specter in light of Shakespeare's own Catholic family background, including the Borromeo "spiritual testament" allegedly signed by John Shakespeare.[63] Shakespeare's particular "sensitivity to the dead" in *Hamlet*, Greenblatt suggests, may partly be the result of the loss of his son Hamnet in 1596 and the death of his father in 1601.[64] Like Greenblatt, Wilson and Milward discern an autobiographical element in the Ghost, both of whom find it representative of an irrepressible Catholic past that has returned to make demands on Hamlet and Shakespeare.[65] Freeman takes this notion farther, arguing that the Ghost's visit resonates with "the distant calls from Rome to encourage recusants in a desperate cause" and that its directives "echo those of proselytizers urging temporizing recusants to outright resistance even to the point of martyrdom."[66] Expanding on this strain of criticism, Beauregard contends that the Ghost "has obviously come back from Purgatory" and argues that its call for revenge is ethical from the standpoint of an Aristotelian-Thomistic virtue ethics that various Jesuits were using to justify tyrannicide.[67] While Beauregard persuasively demonstrates that Hamlet's revenge against Claudius is morally justified from this virtue ethics tradition and that it is the Ghost who instills this principle in Hamlet, I want to distinguish my own position by examining whether it is as

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[62] Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 252.
[63] Ibid, 248-49, 254.
[64] Ibid, 248.
[65] Wilson, 50-51;
[66] Freeman, 251, 254.
[67] Beauregard, 91, 93-96.

obvious as Beauregard claims that the Ghost comes from Purgatory, as well as asking whether the play is necessarily presenting Hamlet's assassination of Claudius as a prudent course of action, however morally justified the prince may be in taking it.

Inasmuch as Claudius's elimination of Old Hamlet resonates with the Tudor erasure of papal influence from England, the Ghost's message that Claudius is a murderous usurper against whom Hamlet will surely take revenge if he ever loved his father parallels Pope Pius V's demand that Catholics disobey Elizabeth and the license it was thought to have given for her assassination. In the popular imagination, Jesuits were often perceived as the papal purveyors of such schemes, enticers of sensitive minds to take up arms against the monarch. Indeed, this view could be found among recusant Catholics, who frequently viewed Jesuits as overweening in their political intrigues and adopting an overaggressive posture that was only provoking greater Catholic persecution.[68] In a 1601 pamphlet, for example, the recusant priest Christopher Bagshaw complains of the "Iesuiticall ghosts, the diuersitie of such wicked spirits, as transforming themselues into angels of light, leade more soules to hell with them, then the feends of most vglie shape appearing in their own proper colours."[69] Among the charges he raises against them, Bagshaw accuses the Jesuits of "stirring up strie, setting kingdomes against kingdomes, raising rebellions, murthering of Princes, and by we know not how many stratagems of Sathan, comming out of hell, and tending to confusion."[70] In *Hamlet*, I contend, the problem that English Catholics faced about whether they should resist Elizabeth by force is mapped onto the ambiguity concerning the nature of the Ghost. Just as Marcellus fails to strike the Ghost physically with his spear in *Hamlet*'s opening, the prince struggles to get an intellectual grasp on

[68] Thomas M. McCoog, "And Touching Our Society": *Fashioning Jesuit Identity in Elizabethan England. Catholic and Recusant Texts of the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods*, 391.
[69] Christopher Bagshaw, *A sparing discouerie of our English Iesuits*, a-a2.
[70] Ibid, 6.

it, as he vacillates between whether it is "a spirit of health or goblin damned" (1.4.40). Hamlet acknowledges this dilemma as soon as he sees the Ghost, but initially offers it the benefit of the doubt in the hope of conversing with it, declaring, "Thou com'st in such a questionable shape/ That I will speak to thee. I'll call thee Hamlet, / King, father, royal Dane" (44-45). At the end of this encounter, Hamlet seems to accept the Ghost's testimony as authentic, since he passionately resolves to clear his mind and store its "commandment" (1.5.102) alone within his brain. By the time the players arrive at court, though, Hamlet has not yet taken action against Claudius, and in preparing the mouse-trap, he expresses doubt about the Ghost:

> The spirit that I have seen
> May be a de'il, and the de'il hath power
> T'assume a pleasing shape. Yea, and perhaps
> Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
> As he is very potent with such spirits,
> Abuses me to damn me! (2.2.533-539).

Hamlet's deliberation recalls Bagshaw's characterization of Jesuits as "wicked spirits" who assume forms of "angels of light", except that for Bagshaw, he is certain of the Jesuits' hellish origin – that they are not what they seem – whereas for Hamlet, the Ghost's true nature is again an open question. As Hamlet says to Horatio before the performance of *The Murder of Gonzago*, if Claudius does not exhibit guilt during the play, then "it is a damned Ghost that we have seen / And my imaginations are as foul / As Vulcan's stithy" (78). In Hamlet's judgment, at least, Claudius's flight from the performance confirms the Ghost's narrative, whose word Hamlet will now take "for a thousand pound" (279), and when he sees the Ghost again in Gertrude's chamber, his repeated use of the words "him" and "he" (121, 133-34) in referencing the Ghost signals that

the prince has come to accept it as his father's spirit. Claudius's admission of his "brother's murder" (3.3.38) confirms to the audience that the Ghost spoke truth in reporting Old Hamlet's murder, but is this the same as substantiating that the Ghost is indeed a "spirit of health", as Hamlet now assumes, and not a "goblin damned"? (1.4.40).[71]

To the play's end, I submit, the Ghost remains an ambiguous "thing" (1.1.20) whose nature is indeterminate, in contradistinction from critics who read it as clearly coming from Purgatory. Certainly, the Ghost all but claims this when it says, "I am thy father's spirit, / Doomed for a certain term to walk the night / And for the day confined to fast in fires / Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature / Are burnt and purged away" (1.5.9-13). In addition to the Ghost's testimony, Beauregard points to its claim that it was deprived of the Catholic sacraments (77), as well as the Ghost couching its own murder "in natural law terms, not in terms of a voluntaristic code or duty ethic" (25-28). First, I want to examine the Ghost's reference to how it was deprived of the sacraments when it was murdered, because the devil may be in the details:

> Thus was I sleeping by a brother's hand
> Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched,
> Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,
> Unhouseled, disappointed, unaneled,
> No reckoning made but sent to my account
> With all my imperfections on my head.
> O horrible, O horrible, most horrible! (74-80).

Certainly this passage contributes to the Ghost's self-portrait as a sympathetic victim, but it also raises a major theological problem, and to borrow Hamlet's phrase from later in the play, these lines "would be scanned" (3.3.75). Within the traditional Catholic theology that the Ghost's sacramental discourse is pointing towards, Purgatory is a condition of cleansing suffering for

[71] Here we should keep in mind Banquo's warning about the witches in *Macbeth*: "And oftentimes, to win us to our harm, / The instruments of darkness tell us truths, / Win us with honest trifles, to betray's / In deepest consequence" (1.3.125-28). Evil spirits are not averse towards speaking truth for nefarious purposes in Shakespearean tragedy.

those who die in a "state of grace" but who nonetheless either have venial faults on their soul, or who have neglected on earth to perform sufficient penance to satisfy the temporal punishment due for their sins. In contrast, the damned include those who die with grave sin on their soul. Now, the Ghost has already told Hamlet that it was guilty of "foul crimes" (1.5.12) that are being purged in the afterlife – language that hardly indicates minor offenses – and it now tells Hamlet that those sins were blossoming when it was killed, which suggests that the Ghost had reached a height of its immorality at the time. This report conflicts with the idealized image of Old Hamlet that we are given throughout the play, but more importantly, it is in serious tension, if not outright contradiction, with the Ghost's claim that it is coming from Purgatory. Without the benefit of penance, communion, and last rites, this problem is only compounded. While Catholic theology is flexible enough that it imagines the possibility of extra-sacramental forgiveness if a sinner makes a sincere act of "perfect contrition" and intends to confess at the next opportunity, the Ghost does not indicate that it managed to perform any such penitence: "No reckoning made but sent to my account / With all my imperfections on my head" (78-79). Here the term "imperfections" should be taken in in its strongest form, given the context of the Ghost's earlier claim that it committed "foul crimes" that were in bloom when it perished. Rather than a person dying in a state of friendship with God but in need of some purgation, the Ghost's account more closely resembles the case of a damned soul. Further, consider Hamlet's deliberation when he is about to kill Claudius in prayer:

> A villain kills my father, and for that
> I, his sole son, do this same villain send
> To heaven.
> Why, this is base and silly, not revenge.
> 'A took my father grossly full of bread
> With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May,
> And how his audit stands who knows, save heaven
> But in our circumstance and course of thought

'Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged
To take him in the purging of his soul
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
No. [Sheathes sword.]. (3.3.76-87)

Here Hamlet recalls the condition of the Ghost's soul at death, as it was earlier related to him: Old Hamlet was purportedly not in a pious or repentant frame of mind at this point in his life, but in a state of sensual indulgence. However, some of the details here suggest that doubt may be entering Hamlet's mind about whether his father is indeed in purgatory. As the Arden edition's note points out, "'Fulnes of bread' is listed as a state of sin in Ezekiel 16:49" and although "grossly" may refer to how Old Hamlet was dispatched, it could easily refer to the condition of his soul at the time.[72] Such a reading would certainly be consistent with Hamlet's comment that his father's "crimes" were "broad blown, flush as May" and that his "audit" is "heavy" in heaven's eyes. Although the Ghost indicates to Hamlet on the ramparts that it is in Purgatory, Hamlet may now be expressing some skepticism towards this claim when he comments, "And how his audit stands who knows, save heaven, But in our circumstance and course of thought / 'Tis heavy with him." The statement rings with an agnosticism on the topic that seems at odds with the Ghost's report, which if Hamlet believes it, provides him with *some* sense of his father's "audit". While it is possible Hamlet is referring to his father's "audit" in relation to how long Old Hamlet must stay in purgatory, he may instead be using it in reference to the more general issue of his father's salvation or damnation. Unlike the dire straights in which he has been told his father died, Hamlet believes Claudius is now repenting and "purging" his own soul, rendering him "fit and

[72] *Hamlet*, n.80, p. 362; Ezekiel 16:49 reads, "Pride was the fault of her, this sister of thine; pride and a full belly; the peace and plenty she and her daughters had, with no thought for the poor that stood in need!"

seasoned" for heaven if he were to die now.[73] But of course, Hamlet wants no such fate for Claudius, as he then says:

> Up Sword, and know thou a more horrid hent
> When he is drunk, asleep or in his rage,
> Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed,
> At game a-swearing, or about some act
> That has no relish of salvation in't.
> Then trip him that his heels may kick at heaven
> And that his soul may be as damned and black
> As hell whereto it goes. (88-95)

In almost all of the situations Hamlet describes here, he would be catching Claudius in some kind of outright immoral action, the very opposite of repentance. However, the line "When he is drunk, asleep or in his rage" is curious for the fact that the second quarto includes a comma between "drunk" and "asleep" whereas the folio lacks such punctuation. Without the comma, as in the folio, "drunk" and "asleep" become linked, as in the case of someone who has passed out from drink. With the comma, as in the second quarto, such a reading remains plausible, but it also suggests the possibility that Hamlet looks to kill Claudius when the king is, simply, asleep. Here the situation overlaps with the manner of Old Hamlet's death, who was also killed in his sleep. The other scenarios in this speech carry "no relish of salvation" in the sense that Claudius is killed while sinning, but "no relish of salvation" might also be applicable to the unenviable situation of someone who lacks the opportunity to repent, and must suddenly face judgment in whatever spiritual condition they happen to be in at the time. The Ghost earlier bemoaned the terrible disadvantage of such a death, moaning, "O horrible, O horrible, most horrible!" (1.5.80), and now Hamlet recognizes that if the deceased is in a state of sin when they are killed in their

[73] It is unclear whether it is heaven or instead purgatory that Hamlet believes he would be sending Claudius to if he killed him right now. Either are compatible with Hamlet's statements earlier in the speech that he would be sending Claudius to heaven, since both assume the soul's salvation and place in heaven, whether it is reached immediately or eventually.

sleep, their soul would not go to purgatory, since it would "be as damned and black / As hell whereto it goes" (3.4.94-95). Of course, Hamlet is mistaken in assuming that Claudius's outward piety reflects a repentant heart here – one more example in this play of outward seeming at odds with a very different interior – yet the speech is revealing for how its theological principles blur any line between Old Hamlet's state of soul at the moment of death and how Hamlet would like Claudius to die, even if this goes unnoticed by Hamlet himself.

In addition to the theological problem that surrounds the Ghost's purported spiritual condition at death and its fate thereafter, the Ghost's demeanor when it speaks to Hamlet raises concerns about its authenticity. For someone claiming to come from Purgatory, one sin that has not yet been stripped away from the Ghost is pride, which is, perhaps not coincidentally, the primary fault of the devil within Christian theology. To be sure, Horatio attests to Old Hamlet's greatness several times, even remarking that all of Europe viewed the former king as "valiant" (1.1.83-84). Thus, although Hamlet's idealized image of his father is undoubtedly aggrandized to some extent, it seems to hold some merit, at least in terms of the public persona Old Hamlet projected to the world. Still, it is one thing for *others* to praise Old Hamlet, and quite another for *him* to do so:

> O Hamlet, what falling off was there,
> From me whose love was of that dignity
> That it went hand in hand even with the vow
> I made to her in marriage, and to decline
> Upon a wretch whose natural gifts were poor
> To those of mine.
> But Virtue, as it never will be moved
> Though Lewdness court it in a shape of heaven,
> So Lust, though to a radiant angel linked,
> Will sate itself in a celestial bed
> And prey on garbage. (1.5.47-57)

As much a stroking of its own ego as an account of Gertrude's infidelity and a lambasting of Claudius, the Ghost's speech takes every opportunity to boast of its own qualities, including a bawdy reference to the superiority of its own "natural gifts". True as the Ghost's observations about "Virtue", "Lewdness" and "Lust" may be in the abstract, the passage carries what can easily seem like a self-righteous tone, particularly in the Ghost's casting itself as "a radiant angel". Considering that Hamlet elsewhere says "The spirit that I have seen / May be a de'il, and the de'il hath power / T'assume a pleasing shape" (2.2.533-35), which itself echoes the biblical warning that "Satan himself is transformed into an Angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14), the Ghost's own conspicuous self-identification as a "radiant angel" (1.5.55) can be read more as an indictment of the Ghost rather than an endorsement. The Ghost's conceit and praise of its own "Virtue" only makes the question of just what its "foul crimes" (12) were more urgent. In short, what is a "radiant angel" doing in purgatory?

More disturbing still is how the Ghost manipulates Hamlet during their meeting, including in a way that suggests it was listening in on Hamlet's words elsewhere in the castle and is now using that knowledge for maximum rhetorical effect. After building suspense and interest in Hamlet by teasing out the chilling "secrets" of its "prison-house" (14) only to withdraw the tale because "this eternal blazon must not be / To ears of flesh and blood" (21-22), the Ghost tells Hamlet, "If thou didst ever thy dear father love – . . . Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!" (23-25). In the same way that Hamlet predicates Gertrude's love for Old Hamlet on her remaining a widow following her husband's death, the Ghost now stakes Hamlet's own love upon his willingness to carry out revenge. Once Hamlet affirms his willingness to take action, he does not receive gratitude or affection from the Ghost, but is merely told "I find thee apt" (31) and admonished: "And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed / That roots itself in

ease on Lethe wharf / Wouldst thou not stir in this" (31-34). Was the Ghost eavesdropping on Hamlet during his first soliloquy, in which Hamlet expressed his disgust for the world by comparing it to an "unweeded garden" (1.2.135) just before complaining of Gertrude's unfaithfulness? Here the Ghost throws the weed image back at Hamlet, except now the Ghost intensifies it, imagining the weed as swollen and tying the image directly to forgetfulness by placing the weed "on Lethe wharf" (1.5.33). "Brief let me be" the Ghost says despite recounting its poisoning in lengthy and gross detail, upon which it again uses a kind of emotional blackmail against Hamlet, saying, "If thou hast nature in thee bear it not, / Let not the royal bed of Denmark be / A couch for luxury and damned incest" (82-83). With these words, as with the Ghost's earlier ultimatum, "If thou didst ever thy dear father love – . . . Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder!", Gertrude's fidelity toward Old Hamlet is no longer under the microscope, but Hamlet's own is now under intense scrutiny for the rest of the play.

If the Ghost's use of Catholic discourse regarding the sacraments does not clearly signal that it has come from Purgatory, what about the notion that its call for revenge is ethical on the grounds of virtue ethics, as Beauregard claims? Does this not justify the morality of the Ghost's call to revenge, and by extension, support its authenticity as a good spirit? According to this reading, the Ghost's injunction to Hamlet that no matter how he kills Claudius, Hamlet should not "taint" his "mind" (85) echoes an ethical tradition spanning from Aquinas through Parsons and Suarez allowing for tyrannicide under particular conditions, including that the avenger is not acting in hatred or intending evil upon the offender.[74] Contrasting this "virtue ethics" against the "duty ethics" of the Elizabethan homilies which preclude the notion of a moral rebellion or disobedience, Beauregard then persuasively argues that the moral "problem" of revenge is

[74] Beauregard, 92-95.

resolved when we consider Hamlet as someone struggling to perform a virtuous and just act of vengeance, and who finally achieves it in the end after numerous missteps of cruelty or passivity along the way. Beauregard persuasively argues that Hamlet's revenge against Claudius is morally justifiable from a "virtue ethics" standpoint, but we have cause to question whether Hamlet's assassination of Claudius leaves Denmark in a better state than at the play's opening. Given the connection I have drawn between the Ghost and "Jesuitical" priests operating in England, it is not surprising to find the Ghost using this type of moral framework in its call for Hamlet to kill Claudius, since this is the very same one that Jesuits like Parsons and Garnet expounded in their own calls for Catholics to take up arms against Elizabeth. Beauregard is able to argue that the Ghost is indeed from Purgatory based on its virtue ethics because he assumes that Shakespeare drawing upon these moral principles in his representation of the Ghost and Hamlet's revenge is equivalent to the play validating them. Here I would like to make an important distinction and claim that while Hamlet's killing of Claudius may not be a personal sin for him and can be morally justified on the grounds Beauregard lays out, this is not the same as the play presenting Hamlet's vengeance as a prudent action given Denmark's political situation, and on this issue, *Hamlet* is more ambivalent than Beauregard gives the play credit for.

For a man who has killed the old king and usurped the crown, one thing that is notable about Claudius is that far from planning Hamlet's demise at the start of the play as a means of tying off loose ends, he instead shows a great deal of patience towards his stepson in what seems like a sincere hope that Hamlet will come around to accepting the new regime. Claudius himself is depicted as a capable ruler, and as Northop Frye says, "if we could manage to forget what Claudius did to become king, we could see what everybody except Hamlet and Horatio sees, a

strong and attractive monarch."[75] As referenced earlier, there is a sense in this play that had Hamlet not sought revenge, Denmark would be left standing at the play's end. In this regard, Rosencrantz's speech to Claudius about the far-reaching ramifications of a monarch's death deserves attention:

> . . . The cess of majesty
> Dies not alone, but like a gulf doth draw
> What's near it with it; or it is a massy wheel
> Fixed on the summit of the highest mount
> To whose huge spokes ten thousand lesser things
> Are mortised and adjoined, which when it falls
> Each small annexment, petty consequence,
> Attends the boisterous ruin. Never alone
> Did the king sigh but with a general groan. (3.3.15-23)

Rosencrantz's description of how a hierarchical kingdom's stability depends on the monarch's welfare would have likely carried topical resonance for Hamlet's audience, who had seen Elizabeth survive several assassination plots and was also dealing with the anxiety of their queen not appointing an heir even in her old age. Within *Hamlet* itself, the speech plays out in an ambivalent way. Old Hamlet's death does not lead to the kind of societal upheaval of Denmark that Rosencrantz seems to envision here, but it instead results in a subtle rupture between being and seeming among its court. Ironically, it is instead Hamlet's pursuit of Claudius that leaves Denmark's court in a heap of corpses and the kingdom under the rule of a Norwegian prince – a drastic departure from the *Ur-Hamlet*, which concludes with the prince killing his uncle and taking up his place on the throne of Denmark.

Given Hamlet's nonconformity after Claudius's inaugural address, it is hardly surprising that Claudius does not allow Hamlet to return to Wittenberg. Because Hamlet has not yet

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[75] For a classic defense of Claudius's positive qualities, see Northop Frye, 539. For a more recent examination of Claudius's good features, see Spargo R. Clifton, *The Ethics of Mourning: Grief and Responsibility in Elegaic Literature* (Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 2004), 51-52.

removed his father from his "mind's eye" (1.2.184), Claudius is not ready to let the prince out of the "cheer and comfort" of his own "eye" (116). As Hamlet grows increasingly erratic, a quasi-surveillance system springs up around the prince to discover what lies behind his disturbing behavior, and Ophelia's description of him as "Th' observed of all observers" (3.1.153) begins to take on ironic meaning. This project is spearheaded by Polonius, who some critics view as a satirical reflection of Lord Burghley, Elizabeth's own chief counselor.[76] More sensible, I find, is the claim made by critics like Gerard Kilroy and John Klause that Polonius can be viewed as a composite of Burghley and Walsingham, the latter of whom headed Elizabeth's spy network.[77] Having already sent Reynaldo as a "bait of falsehood" to catch Laertes's "carp of truth" (2.1.60), Polonius sets out to "find / Where truth is hid, though it were hid indeed / Within the centre" (2.2.154-56). In collaboration with Claudius, Polonius uses his own daughter to set up a false scene (his own "mouse-trap") in the hope of discovering whether Hamlet's affliction is due to lovesickness or some other cause. As Hamlet himself will soon do with the players, Polonius acts as a director, telling Ophelia where to go and what to do in order that they may elicit a revealing reaction out of Hamlet (3.1.43).

Having already made plans to send Hamlet to England, Hamlet's violent reaction towards Ophelia only further worries Claudius, who now fears that "the hatch and the disclose" of

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[76] See Alfred Thomas, *Shakespeare, Dissent, and the Cold War,* 76; Beauregard, 90; John Guy, *Queen of Scots,* 494; Christopher Devlin, *Hamlet's Divinity and Other Essays*, 42.

[77] See Kilroy, 144. As Klause explains: "Burghley was a major figure in the Elizabethan intelligence system, but not as fully engaged with it as was Sir Francis Walsingham. Since one need not assume that Shakespeare meant to suggest any single person in the character of Polonius and may have combined in him aspects of different individuals, it is fair to consider the lineaments of Mr. Secretary Walsingham in Claudius's counsellor – especially since there is warrant in Southwell's writings for doing so" (162). Klause then goes on to show how Shakespeare would have been familiar with the view of Walsingham as spymaster through the writings of Robert Southwell, whom recent critics of Shakespeare's Catholic background have argued had an influence on Shakespeare's writing. See John Klause, *Shakespeare, the Earl, and the Jesuit,* 162-65.

Hamlet's distemper "Will be some danger" (3.1.165-66). At this point, Claudius may be speaking the truth when he says that he hopes the change in landscape will stimulate a change in Hamlet's attitude, but he may already be intending to include the letter which orders Hamlet's execution. Claudius's fear certainly proves true when Hamlet kills Polonius behind the curtain under the assumption that it is the king. Hamlet's botched attempt to kill Claudius would have likely carried contemporary political resonance for an early modern audience, who may have recalled the Ridolfi Plot, the Throckmorton Plot, or the Babington plot – each an unsuccessful attempt by Catholics to assassinate Elizabeth. When Hamlet does finally succeed in killing Claudius at the end of the play, it is not without devastating effects, such that Fortinbras can accurately declare, "O proud Death, /What feast is toward in thine eternal cell /That thou so many princes at a shot / So bloodily hast struck?" (5.2.348-51). In the opening act of the play, Marcellus remarks that "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark" (1.4.90). As he lays dying, Hamlet has seemingly purified the court of that contagion, at least for awhile, but the play ends on an ambivalent note about which is worse – the evil Hamlet has driven out, or the carnage that was inflicted to purge Denmark of its disease. Indeed, this is the great irony of the play, that Claudius has killed a true king and Denmark is left standing, whereas Hamlet kills a usurper and the kingdom falls.

Chapter 3:

"I am Nothing if Not Critical": Othello and The Limits of Private Judgment

During *Othello*'s final scene, the titular character insists to Emilia that by killing Desdemona, he has killed an adulteress, adding, "Had she been true, / If heaven would make me such another world / Of one entire and perfect chrysolite, / I'd not have sold her for it" (5.2.139-42). Even at the height of his deception, Othello manages to acknowledge how invaluable Desdemona would be if not for her purported infidelity. Othello's appraisal of Desdemona as worth more than a world-sized gem is not the last time he makes such a comparison in the play; not long after he discovers that Desdemona was faithful and Iago deceived him, Othello compares himself to "one whose hand, / Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away / Richer than all his tribe" (344-46).[1] In the deeply biblical culture of early modern England, the image of the "pearl" would have reminded many in Shakespeare's audience of Matthew 13:34-46, where Christ likens the kingdom of heaven to "a pearl of great price" for which a merchant "went and sold all that he had and bought it." Depending on the parable's exposition, the pearl could be tied to any one of several closely linked meanings, including the gospel, Christ himself, or his Church. Unlike the merchant, however, Othello has squandered his pearl by murdering Desdemona, an act that the Moor links to his own damnation when he bewails, "O ill-starred

[1] Critics have long debated whether the Quarto's use of the term "Indian" or the Folio's word "Iudean" is more preferable here – if we accept the former, Kim Hall explains in *Othello: Texts and Contexts*, then Othello is likening himself to "an ignorant savage who cannot recognize the value of a precious jewel," but with the latter option, Othello is comparing himself "to Herod, who slew Miriamne in a fit of jealousy, or to Judas Iscariot, the betrayer of Christ" (164, n.357). Despite the difference between "Indian" and "Iudean" I agree with Roy Battenhouse when he writes: "Even if we follow those editors who prefer to read 'Indian' (Quarto, 1622) instead of 'Iudean' (Folio, 1623), the twin images of priceless pearl and deadly kiss are sufficient to evoke biblical echoes. The Judas who betrayed with a kiss, and whose bargaining away of Christ-the-pearl inverted tragically the parable of the merchant of Matthew 13:45, resembles Othello all too obviously" in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 96.

wench, / Pale as thy smock. When we shall meet at compt / This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven / And fiends will snatch at it." (270-273). As critics have long recognized, Desdemona's association with an invaluable pearl in this scene is but the culmination of Shakespeare's endowing her with Christ-like features throughout *Othello*. In this way, the playwright invests Othello's separation from Desdemona with the weight of what his audience would have regarded as the ultimate tragedy, namely, an individual's separation from Christ. However, I want to focus on how Desdemona can be viewed not as a figure for Christ, but for what the New Testament names Christ's "body" – the Church.[2] I will do this first by showing how such a reading reconciles Christ-like and Marian traits in her character, and then through exploring the ecclesial implications of Othello mistaking her for a "whore" (4.2.73) – implications which bear examination in light of protestant vilification of the Roman Church as the infamous "whore of babylon". In this chapter, I will argue that Iago's cultivation of a critical stance in Othello against Desdemona dramatizes early modern Protestantism's dissemination of a hermeneutic of suspicion towards the institutional church. What the play shows us in Othello's falling away from Desdemona, I contend, are the limits of reason and necessity of interpersonal faith for Christians retaining communion with magisterial religious authority during this period when the institutional church was subject to an unprecedented amount of polemic.

Looking at *Othello* in this way offers a very different reading from previous religious criticism of the play, while also extending certain insights of recent scholarship. Among those who focus on *Othello*'s religious elements, Daniel Vitkus argues that the primary religio-political context through which audiences would have viewed *Othello*'s domestic tragedy is the struggle between Christendom and the Ottoman Turks, and that in believing Iago's lies and killing

[2] See, for example, Ephesians 5:23.

Desdemona, Othello would have been seen as converting to "a black, Muslim identity, an embodiment of the Europeans' phobic fantasy".[3] Still, as other critics have shown, *Othello* draws on reformation controversy in its representation of Christian-Islamic strife, such that early modern audiences may have found parallels between the drama they were seeing onstage and the inter-Christian conflicts they knew all too well. Richard Wilson, for one, reads the play as a pro-Catholic loyalist, anti-Jesuit drama, finding comparisons between Iago's sabotage of Othello and Desdemona's marriage and the disruptive force that Catholic Jesuits were thought to be having on negotiations for religious toleration.[4] Alternatively, R. Chris Hassel, Jr., Lisa Hopkins, and Greg Maillet highlight the Marian motifs surrounding Desdemona, each arriving at different conclusions regarding *Othello*'s relationship to the controversial practice of Marian devotion. [5] Still others have discussed the play's treatment of providence and merit, with several studies coalescing around the view that Othello's mistake lies in him coming to think Desdemona loved him for his merits rather than unconditionally, and according to this reading, the play offers a Protestant critique of salvation by works.[6] Robert Watson has made perhaps the most thorough case for this view, arguing that the play dramatizes a "Reformation Tragedy" from a pro-Protestant perspective.[7]

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[3] Daniel Vitkus, *Turning Turk: English Theater and the Multicultural Mediterranean, 1570-1630* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 106.
[4] Wilson, 155-85.
[5] Hassel, Jr., "Intercession, Detraction, and Just Judgment in *Othello*," 43-67; Lisa Hopkins, "'Black but Beautiful': *Othello* and the Cult of the Black Madonna," 75-86; Greg Maillet, "Desdemona and the Mariological Theology of the Will in *Othello*," 87-110.
[6] On *Othello*'s treatment of providence, see Robert Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God's Judgments*, 127-58; Maurice Hunt, *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness*, 97-125. For readings of the play as critiquing salvation by works, see Hunt, *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness*, 97-125; Hassel, Jr., "Intercession, Detraction, and Just Judgment in *Othello*," 43-67; Robert N. Watson, "*Othello* as Reformation Tragedy," 65-96.
[7] Watson, 65.

On the one hand, I find Watson's analysis a very persuasive reading and believe that many theatergoers may have viewed the play in this manner. If Vitkus identifies *Othello* as "a drama of conversion, in particular a conversion to certain forms of faithlessness deeply feared by Shakespeare's audience" then what Watson and others have done is explicate how one segment of English playgoers may have mapped their own fear of Roman "faithlessness" onto an Islamic "faithlessness" that consumes Othello by the play's end.[8] More recently, however, Joshua Avery has examined Othello's misunderstanding of Desdemona's love from an epistemological perspective rather than the soteriological one critics have emphasized.[9] Avery argues that throughout the play, Othello practices an epistemological method which parallels a Lutheran "rationalistic and empirical skepticism" in its strict adherence to "tangible evidence".[10] The resulting "interpretive literalism" of this approach, Avery contends, produces strictures on Othello's imagination which make him easy prey for Iago.[11] Although Avery provides a compelling case for how *Othello* "critiques the rigid controls placed upon the imagination by the Protestant sensibility," I would suggest that the play's engagement with religious epistemology warrants a stronger and more extensive ecclesial emphasis than the largely philosophical and psychological focus of his study.[12] Early in his essay, Avery observes that "epistemology is one of the points of division between Protestant and Catholic understandings" and soon after acknowledges that the former is centrally manifested in *sola Scriptura*, which "[denies] human beings the right to add anything to the strict data of the sacred text."[13] Catholic epistemology, however, receives little attention in Avery's analysis, when its inclusion would not only throw

[8] Vitkus, 77.
[9] Joshua Avery, "Protestant Epistemology and Othello's Consciousness," 268-86.
[10] Ibid, 269, 277.
[11] Ibid, 270.
[12] Ibid, 282.
[13] Ibid, 269.

into greater relief *Othello*'s relationship to *sola Scriptura*, but the play's meditation on faith and religious controversy more broadly. That this play is about one man's lack of faith has long been recognized by critics, and yet my reading of that "faith" in which Othello is found wanting is neither the soteriological faith posited by Watson, nor the "mystical" faith in paradox asserted by Avery, but rather a faith distinctly relational in its character, that is, an interpersonal faith that believes in Desdemona as a truth-speaking subject in regards to her marital fidelity.[14]

In order to illustrate why Desdemona should be viewed as a figure for the church in this play, I first want to highlight the insights derived mostly from an older generation of critics who view her as an image of Christ in the play's *psychomachian* struggle for the soul of Othello. Irving Ribner articulates the common foundation for critics who espouse this reading when he observes that "in the total scheme of the play [Desdemona] stands from first to last as an incarnation of self-sacrificing love. She is a reflection of Christ, who must die at the hands of man, but out of whose death may spring man's redemption."[15] Pointing out that "Elizabethans were habituated to regard human action in terms of [biblical] analog," Paul Siegel likewise observes that Desdemona's "forgiveness and perfect love, a love requited by death" make her "reminiscent of Christ".[16] Beyond her depiction as a virtuous innocent made to suffer for the faults of others, however, it is some of the finer details surrounding the "divine Desdemona" (2.1.73), as Cassio calls her, that make for compelling comparisons between Desdemona and Christ. For example, Ribner and Siegel both discern a parallel between Satan's temptation of Christ in the wilderness and Emilia's argument to Desdemona that a wife should be willing to

[14] Watson, 66; Avery, 270-71.
[15] Irving Ribner, *Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy*, 112.
[16] Paul N. Siegel, "The Damnation of *Othello*," 1068. Stanley Edgar Hyman observes that Desdemona "is a figuration of Jesus Christ" as "an image of perfect innocence suffering perfect injustice" in *Iago*, 32; See also Harry Morris, *Last Things in Shakespeare*, 84-85.

cheat on her husband in order to gain "all the world" (4.3.74).[17] "Why, the wrong is but a wrong i'th' world," Emilia explains, "and having the world for your labour, 'tis a wrong in your own world, and you might quickly make it right" (79-81). Commenting on this moment, Regina Schwartz notes that "Just as Jesus need only do homage to Satan to gain the whole world, so in Emilia's test, Desdemona could have the whole world for one infelicity."[18] Even while Roy Battenhouse sensibly acknowledges that "[we] need not infer that Shakespeare was equating Desdemona with Christ," he is one of several critics who find similarities between Othello's turning on Desdemona and Judas's betrayal of Jesus, while also acknowledging that "at the core of the play's meaning is a Christlike martyrdom by Desdemona, fumbling though it be."[19] And according to Watson, Othello's comment that Desdemona's death should coincide with "a huge eclipse / Of sun and moon, and that th'affrighted globe / Should yawn at alteration" (5.2.98-11) recalls the Gospel's report of an eclipse and rending of the Temple veil at the time of Christ's death.[20] Desdemona's attempt in her last words to take the blame for her own murder may be dissatisfactory from the standpoints of sexual politics or earthly justice, but it is a choice that resonates with Christ's decision to take upon himself the sins of humanity.[21]

Recent criticism, though, has seen a shift away from highlighting Desdemona's Christ-like aspects and instead foregrounded her Marian features. One significant Marian connection to Desdemona is found in Cassio's rapturous announcement of her arrival on Cyprus:

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[17] Ribner, 112-13; Siegel, 1073; Hyman, 47.
[18] Regina Schwartz, "*Othello* and the Horizon of Justice." *Transcendence: Philosophy, Literature, and Theology Approach the Beyond*. Ed. Regina Schwartz (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 97.
[19] Roy Battenhouse, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, 97; Joan Ozark Holmer, "Othello's Threnos: 'Arabian Trees' and 'Indian' Versus 'Judean'," 160; Cherrell Guilfoyle, "Othello, Otuel, and the English Charlemagne Romances," 54; Hyman, 47-60.
[20] Watson, 67.
[21] Ibid, 68.

> O, behold,
> The riches of the ship is come on shore:
> You men of Cyprus, let her have your knees!
> Hail to thee, lady, and the grace of heaven,
> Before, behind thee, and on every hand
> Enwheel thee round! (2.1.82-87)

As Greg Maillet points out, Cassio's praise of Desdemona contains "clear echoes of Catholic biblical and liturgical praise of Mary" that many in Shakespeare's audience would have recognized:

> Mary, in this tradition, is the lady before whom one should kneel to say 'Ave' or 'Hail,' for solely by 'the grace of heaven' she becomes plena gratia,' or 'full of grace,' and hence a 'stella maris,' or star of the sea, a Lady Wisdom who guides the ship's safe passage through the storms of fortune by binding her will to the wheel of providence.[22]

Additionally, critics have found Desdemona's attempt to intervene on behalf of Cassio evocative of the controversial doctrine of Marian intercession.[23] Following Cassio's drunken fight with Roderigo, Iago directs the lieutenant to take advantage of Desdemona's influence over Othello in order to return to the general's good graces: "Confess yourself freely to her, / importune her help to put you in your place again. / She is of so free, so kind, so apt, so blest a disposition / that she holds it a vice in her goodness not do more than she is requested" (2.3.313-17). Desdemona's use of religious language in her plea to Othello that Cassio is "penitent" for his "trespass" (3.3.63-64) as well as her remark that she "would do much / T'atone" (4.1.231-32) the two men underscores the theological subtext of her attempted intercession. If past scholarship has emphasized the Christ-like dimension of Desdemona's character, we can gauge how much the Marian perspective has influenced recent criticism in Maillet's assertion that although Desdemona can be

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[22] Maillet, 87. See also Hassel Jr., "Intercession, Detraction, and Just Judgment in *Othello*," 43; Peter Milward, *Biblical Influences in Shakespeare's Great Tragedies*, 62; David Hillman, "Ave Desdemona," 133-148; Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God's Judgments*, 138.
[23] Hillman, 134, 143, 145, 147-50; Hassel, Jr., "Intercession, Detraction, and Just Judgment in *Othello*," 43-48; Maillet, 105-109; Ruben Espinosa, *Masculinity and Marian Efficacy in Shakespeare's England*, 112, 116.

viewed as representative of Jesus in *Othello*'s final scene, she should be read as a Marian type through the play's end.[24] Maillet's reasoning is less convincing than the arguments he and others offer for Desdemona's Marian aspects in earlier portions of *Othello*,[25] though, and his acknowledgment that "Marian imagery is but one of many motifs that Shakespeare uses to depict Desdemona's exceptional virtue" only lends credence to those who highlight Desdemona's Christ-like qualities throughout the play, particularly in the last scene.[26]

Reading Desdemona as a type of the Christian church, I would suggest, reconciles these Christ-like and Marian traits in her character. On one level, of course, the Church was viewed within Western Christianity as the Body of Christ, and was identifiable with Christ Himself, its head.[27] But also, based off their readings of Scripture, many writers within the Western Christian tradition identified the church with the figure of the virgin, as well as the pre-eminent virgin,

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[24] Ibid, 107-109.

[25] Early in his essay, Maillet makes a sensible observation about the flexibility of typology in interpretation: "Typology, in contrast to allegory, makes no attempt to efface or disguise the obvious contrasts or differences between human characters and the holy personages they partly remind us of; hence, it is a much more flexible and widely used way for faithful Christian writers to draw on Biblical tradition and add depth, meaning, and perhaps even authority to the characters composed by their own imaginations" (88). However, when arguing against Desdemona exhibiting Christ-like traits in the final scene, Maillet suddenly demands rigid correspondence between character and type, asking: "if we are to take seriously Desdemona crying out to the triune Lord, how can she do so if she herself is supposed to represent the one incarnate Son?" (107). As Robert Hunter observes, though, Desdemona echoes Christ's own cry on the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (151). Using Maillet's logic, we might exclude Desdemona as a type of Mary, since at one point, she says, "By'r lady, I could do much!" (3.3.74). Also, while it is true that in the medieval period a pearl was an image used for maidens and maidenhood, the context here of a discarded pearl as well as the Folio's use of "Iudean" more likely points towards the pearl as Christ. Further, Maillet claims that "if Desdemona is taken to represent Christ, then her dying forgiveness of Othello must mean that he is certainly not damned" (107). Perhaps, though, like Christ on the cross, Desdemona is extending forgiveness to Othello, but like Judas in his despair, Othello does not seem to accept it.

[26] Maillet, 87-88.

[27] See Romans 12:5, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18, and Colossians 1:24

Mary herself.[28] "The Mary-Church parallel is based on the virginal motherhood of both," Luigi Gambero explains, "a motherhood that has the same supernatural fructifying principle: the Holy Spirit."[29] By viewing Desdemona as a type of the Church, we find a way of accounting for both her Christ-like and Marian aspects, but we also bring into focus a more explicitly ecclesial dimension of her character that opens new doors for us in exploring how *Othello* may have spoken to early modern audiences' experiences regarding reformation controversy over the identity of Christ's church.

Viewing Desdemona as figurative for the church provides us with a fresh context through which we can read the salvific and epistemic roles she occupies in relation to Othello throughout the play. In response to Brabantio's warning that Desdemona may deceive her newlywed husband, Othello's pledge, "My life upon her faith" (1.3.286) not only refers to his physical life, which he ends by suicide in the final scene, but his inner life too. Upon his reunion with Desdemona following the storm at sea, Othello calls her his "soul's joy" (2.1.182), and says, "If it were now to die / 'Twere now to be most happy, for I fear / My soul hath her content so absolute / That not another comfort like to this / Succeeds in unknown fate" (187-91). Desdemona's union with Othello on the shores of Cyprus grants him such spiritual happiness that he would be content to die in this instant, as he doubts that anything still to come in life could bring him such joy as the present moment. In saying that his "soul" now enjoys utter fulfillment, Othello suggests that he is experiencing a foretaste of heavenly bliss here, and while he is using

[28] See David G. Hunter, "The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church: Reading Psalm 45 in Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine," 281-303; Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Uses of the Song of Songs: Origen and the Later Latin Fathers," 386-427. Luigi Gambero collects Patristic commentary on Mary as a type of the Church in *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*. See his excerpts from Ambrose (198-99), Augustine (222-25), Gregory the Great (367), Clement (71), Ephrem (115-16), Epiphanius (124-25), Gregory Nazianzen (163-64), Isidore (376-77), and Sedulius (290). On Mary as a type of the Church, see also Paul Haffner, *The Mystery of Mary*, 5, 10, 19, 240-43.
[29] Gambero, 198.

religious language to convey his sense of Desdemona's importance to him, Othello's spiritual welfare becomes increasingly linked with his ability to remain in communion with his wife as the play progresses. Following Desdemona's plea to her husband on behalf of the disgraced Cassio, Othello exclaims, “Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul / But I do love thee! And when I love thee not / Chaos is come again” (3.3.90-02). Without Othello's love for Desdemona to give his life shape, Othello's world threatens to become undone and revert to primordial chaos. Othello's words prove prophetic in the ensuing drama, as he not only loses his "tranquil mind" after doubting Desdemona's fidelity, but Othello loses his identity as well, bidding "farewell" to the "Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war" that have defined his identity as a soldier: "Farewell: Othello's occupation's gone" (351-60). Indeed, Othello indicates the epistemic weight he places on Desdemona for his ideals of virtue when he says, "If she be false, O then heaven mocks itself" (282). More than this, once Othello becomes convinced of Desdemona's guilt, he dispels his former "fond love . . . to heaven" and invokes the "black vengeance" of "hollow hell", as he cries, "Yield up, O love, thy crown and hearted throne / To tyrannous hate" (448-52). *Othello*'s plot is designed in such a way that the farther Othello drifts from his wife, the more subject he becomes to infernal power, such that by the time he discovers he was tricked by Iago into killing Desdemona, a defeated Othello turns to Cassio and asks, “Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil / Why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body?” (5.2.298-99). “Exchange me for a goat," Othello says in reaction to Iago's initial aspersions against Desdemona, "When I shall turn the business of my soul / To such exsufflicate and blown surmises, / Matching thy inference" (3.3.183-186). Given the eschatological implications of his marriage, Othello's comment that if he was to start doubting Desdemona's fidelity then he would be exchangeable for a "goat" holds an additional layer of meaning besides the cuckold identity Othello imagines

he would take on – he would also be one of the goats condemned to hell at the last judgment,[30] which is precisely the punishment he later envisions for himself as he looks with dread to the moment when he and Desdemona "shall meet at compt" (5.2.271). Struck with tragic recognition at what he has done in killing his wife, Othello falls into despair and calls upon devils to subject him to hellish torment: "Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur, / Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!" (277-78). In crying, "Whip me, ye devils, / From the possession of this heavenly sight!" (275-76) Othello is not just turning away from the sight of his innocent beloved, but he is also abjuring heaven itself.

By tying the well-being of Othello's soul to Desdemona, Shakespeare presents his audience with a relationship that is analogous to the individual's association with the church in early modern Christianity. Despite disagreements over the nature of the church and who comprised it, for Protestants and Roman Catholics alike in this period, Christ and the church were inextricably linked, and as a result, the phrase "outside the Church there is no salvation" was a common refrain. In a 1521 Christmas sermon, Luther explains the principle thus:

> The Christian church . . . keeps all the words of God in her heart and ponders them, compares one with the other and with Holy Scripture. Therefore he who wants to find Christ, must first find the church. How would one know Christ and faith in him if one did not know where they are who believe in him? He who would know something concerning Christ, must neither trust in himself nor build his bridge into heaven by means of his own reason, but he should go to the church; he should attend it and ask his questions there. The church is not wood and stone but the assembly of people who believe in Christ. With this church one should be connected and see how the people believe, live, and teach. They certainly have Christ in their midst, for outside the Christian church there is no truth, no Christ, no salvation.[31]

Elsewhere in his writing, Luther emphasizes the hidden church of the elect known only to God, but here he discusses the visible aspect of the church and its ministry. Recall that for Luther, as

[30] Matthew 25:31-46.
[31] Martin Luther, "The Gospel for the Early Christmas Service, Luke 2 [:15-20]," 39-40.

for other protestant reformers, the gospel precedes the church, and therefore he identifies the visible church not with any particular institution but with those people who believe the pure gospel. Similarly, Calvin asserts in the *Institutes* that the visible church exists wherever "the Word of God is purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution".[32] "[W]here the preaching of the gospel is reverently heard and the sacraments are not neglected, there for the time being no deceitful or ambiguous form of the church is seen," Calvin explains, "and no one is permitted to spurn its authority, flout its warnings, resist its counsels, or make light of its chastisements – much less to desert it and break its unity."[33] Like Luther, not only does Calvin affirm the visible church's authority, but he maintains that belonging to the church is a prerequisite in order to be saved: "away from her bosom one cannot hope for any forgiveness of sins or any salvation".[34]

Among Counter-Reformation writers, Robert Bellarmine offers the most concise Roman Catholic definition of the visible church, describing it as "a union of men who are united by the profession of the same Christian faith, and by participation in the same Sacraments under the direction of their lawful pastors, especially of the one representative of Christ on earth, the Pope of Rome."[35] Moreover, in his discussion of baptism, Bellarmine maintains that "Outside the Church there is no salvation" and adds, "For this reason the Church is compared with the ark of Noah, because just as during the deluge, everyone perished who was not in the ark, so now those

[32] Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.I.9.
[33] Ibid, IV.I.10.
[34] Ibid, IV.I.4. The principle of "no salvation outside the church" can also be found in the writings of other protestants such as William Perkins, *An exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles*, 487; John Whitgift, *The defense of the aunsvvere to the Admonition*, 360; Richard Bancroft, *A sermon preached at Paules Crosse*, 13.
[35] Robert Bellarmine, *De ecclesia. militante,* 2.

perish who are not in the Church."[36] Edmund Campion also affirms this principal in his attempt to bring Richard Cheney fully into the Roman faith:

> He believes no one article of the faith who refuses to believe any single one. For as soon as he knowingly oversteps the bounds of the Church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth, to which Christ Jesus, the highest, first, and most simple truth, the source, light, leader, line, and rule of the faithful, reveals all these articles, – whatever else of Catholic doctrine he retains yet if he obstinately depraves one dogma, that which he holds he holds not by orthodox faith, without which it is impossible to please God, but by his own reason, his own conviction. In vain do you defend the religion of Catholics, if you hug only that which you like, and cut off all that seems not right in your eyes. . . You must be altogether within the house of god, within the walls of salvation, to be sound and safe from all injury. . .[37]

For all of the commonalities between the two protestant theologians' accounts of the visible church and that of their roman counterparts – the necessity of belonging to the visible church in order to be saved, the authority of its directives, the importance of suspending one's own reason and exercising trust in the church – there is a crucial difference between them that informs my reading of Desdemona as a figure for the church in *Othello*. For both Luther and Calvin, a person must first determine *what* are the gospel and sacraments that Christ instituted, only to then judge *who* among the church's leaders are preaching the pure gospel and administering the sacraments according to the Scriptures. In the view of Bellarmine and Campion, Christ commissioned a specific group of persons to interpret the Word, and thus a person must first identify *who* possesses such authority and then learn from them *what* the gospel and sacraments entail. All four theologians agree, of course, that it is ultimately Christ who determines the content of the gospel and sacraments, but because of their disagreements over *sola Scriptura*, the perspicuity of the Bible, and legitimacy of church tradition as a form of revelation, they differ as to whether the

[36] Ibid, "De Sacramento Baptismi."
[37] Edmund Campion, "Epistle to Richard Cheney, Bishop of Gloucester, written from Douai in 1572," in Richard Simpson, *Edmund Campion: A Biography*, 511, n. 40.

individual Christian may authoritatively interpret the Word or whether a particular judge has been instituted by Christ to do so.

Consequently, while Luther, Calvin, Bellarmine, and Campion all place their fundamental trust in the person of Christ, they diverge in how that trust is exercised. For Luther and Calvin, it is exercised in a Christian's own interior relationship with Christ discovered in the Scriptures, particularly whenever the Christian reader finds the written Word communicating something to him that goes beyond his own sense of reason. In this paradigm, the individual places his trust in Christ, but that trust need not extend to the visible church's teaching office, because for Luther and Calvin, the visible church is conceived as a community of people who *echo* the individual Christian's understanding of the pure gospel and sacraments. Alternatively, because Bellarmine and Campion view Christ as having commissioned a particular institution to authoritatively interpret the Word, a Christian exercises trust in Christ by conforming himself to that teaching body's interpretation of the Word, trusting that in submitting to its voice, particularly when it differs from one's own sense of the Word, he is heeding Christ's own. If for Luther and Calvin the visible church is infallible inasmuch as it proclaims the true gospel discerned by the individual Christian's reading of the Word, for Bellarmine and Campion, the visible church is infallible on account of it being a truth-speaking person *through* whom the true gospel is known.

Reading Desdemona and her declarations of fidelity according to this latter conception of the church as a truth-speaking person is central to understanding how some Jacobean theatergoers may have found a different religious significance in Othello's lack of faith than the soteriological resonance that certain readings contend for, and here I want to turn to the issue of how Othello perceives Desdemona's love for him. In considering Othello's narrative of how he

and Desdemona fell in love, it is important that we recall the charge Brabantio first lays against him in the streets of Venice, because it is this vision that Othello reacts against when he offers his own account to the senate:

> Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her,
> For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
> If she in chains of magic were not bound,
> Whether a maid so tender, fair and happy,
> So opposite to marriage that she shunned
> The wealthy, curled darlings of our nation,
> Would ever have, t'incur a general mock,
> Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
> Of such a thing as thou? To fear, not to delight.
> Judge me the world if 'tis not gross in sense
> That thou hast practised on her with foul charms,
> Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals
> That weakens motion. (1.2.63-75)

Othello's skin color is his predominant feature in the eyes of Brabantio, and it is incomprehensible to him that his daughter could have fallen in love with someone so unlike her in appearance. Because Brabantio believes people are naturally attracted to those who are physically similar to them (or at least he thinks that they *should* be) he mistakes Desdemona's rejection of refined, affluent Venetians as an aversion to marriage itself on her part. Rather than be attracted to Othello, Brabantio is convinced that his daughter would be repelled by the Moor's "sooty bosom," and that Desdemona would never subject herself to the "general mock" she would incur if she willingly married him. When Brabantio takes his complaint to the senate, he repeats these charges and elaborates on this perceived disparity of "nature" between Othello and Desdemona, citing their difference of "years, of country, credit, everything" (1.3.97-98). On the whole, the marriage is an affront to rational sense for Brabantio, and thus he accuses Othello of witchcraft – a practice, Brabantio probably believes, the Moor has retained from a paganism he never left.

Now, we know that Othello has converted to Christianity at some point following his "redemption" from slavery – his plea for Christian morality (2.3.166-68) as well as Iago's reference to Othello's "baptism" (338) indicate as much. If Desdemona can be viewed as a figure for the church, as I have claimed, then Othello's marriage to her can be read as a metaphor for that conversion, and his account of their courtship, a kind of conversion story on his part, albeit as we shall see, an ultimately problematic one.[38] In his eloquent rebuttal before the senate, Othello recounts how Brabantio invited him to tell the tale of his incredible past, and upon noticing Desdemona's interest in his story, Othello found occasion to describe it to her in private. The sufferings Othello endured proved particularly moving to Desdemona, who gave him "a world of sighs" for his "pains" (160), and in Othello's view, this became the basis of their romance: "She loved me for the dangers I had passed / And I loved her that she did pity them" (168-69). Tzachi Zamir observes that hitherto now, Othello has been valued according to the good service he can perform for Venice, but in receiving Desdemona's pity, Othello falls in love with her because "for a change, he is not being used but is understood, becoming the focal point of another's reality."[39] However, as Zamir goes on to point out, there is a discrepancy between Othello's perception that Desdemona loves him "for the dangers [he] had passed" (168) and Desdemona's own insistence that she saw "Othello's visage in his mind," as well as her emphasis

[38] Viewing Desdemona as a figure of the church, the "bride of Christ", does not mean that Othello should be understood as an image of Christ, the bridegroom. Rather, Othello's marriage to Desdemona can be read as paralleling the soul's mystical marriage to Christ and the church through baptism. As for Desdemona herself, a comment made by Ellen Terry regarding Desdemona's aversion towards her Venetian suitors gestures towards my own view of her: "There is something of the potential nun in her. She is more fitted to be the bride of Christ than the bride of any man" in "Desdemona," 61. The image of the mystical marriage was used in conceptualizing both the individual soul's union with Christ and the Church, as well as the Church's relationship with Christ. The soul's mystical marriage to the Church thus grants it access to the mystical marriage with Christ.

[39] Tzachi Zamir, "On Being Too Deeply Loved," 8.

upon his “honours and his valiant parts” (253-54).[40] “Othello thinks that she was responding to his story," Zamir explains, "whereas she perceived and pitied some deeper foundation of his being, seeing his source, his being ‘born in the sun’.”[41] For Maurice Hunt, Othello’s mistaken notion that his "narrated heroics" won him Desdemona’s love denotes a “heresy of merit” that several characters fall into throughout the play.[42] Unlike Hunt, Watson does not read Othello's reference to the “dangers [he] had passed” (168) as the Moor referring to his deeds, but specifically to the "slavery" (139) Othello was subjected to by the "insolent foe" (138), for which Desdemona, as a Christ-like redeemer, takes pity on him.[43] Nonetheless, Watson also identifies Othello's error as a lack of "absolute faith" in Desdemona's love, and in this way, he argues, the play "transposes solifidianism – salvation by faith alone – into the realm of marriage."[44] On the other hand, while acknowledging that Desdemona's "more nebulous" account of her love for Othello "stresses admiration for his intrinsic merit" and thereby "de-emphasizes proof by merits externally perceived," Avery reminds us that Brabantio's accusation of witchcraft places a certain set of rhetorical demands upon Othello's explanation to the senate, whereby "the political logic of the situation has compelled [Othello] to validate her love for him in what are, relatively speaking, rational terms."[45] By pointing to his harrowing story in all of its detail, Othello satisfies the senate’s demand for a logical explanation of Desdemona's attraction to him, which the Duke

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Hunt, *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness,* 104. Similarly, Hassel, Jr. argues that "Othello's grotesque misjudgment, first of Desdemona, then of himself . . . evokes in its persistent considerations of Desdemona's virtues and faults both the central merit-grace issue of the Reformation and the plays and paintings of just judgment, especially their verbal and/or visual weighting of merit and demerit" in "Intercession, Detraction, and Just Judgment in *Othello*," 43-44.
[43] Watson, 75.
[44] Ibid, 66.
[45] Avery, 271.

demonstrates when he admits, "I think this tale would win my daughter too" (172). And yet, as Avery eloquently observes, "[t]he truth of the matter is that there *is* magic in Othello's movement of Desdemona," and that magic is "the ever existing mystery of his or any act of human persuasion, especially including courtship."[46] That Othello must *believe* in Desdemona's love if his marriage is to survive, and not affirm it primarily because the idea makes logical sense to him, becomes apparent once Othello wilts in the face of Iago's rationalist critique. Othello's demystification of his relationship with Desdemona allows the newlyweds to pass the scrutiny of Brabantio and the senate, but in settling on a rational basis for his wife's love for him, Othello unwittingly sews the seeds of his marriage's destruction.

It is at this point in *Othello* that the ecclesial dimension of Desdemona's character truly reveals its explanatory power. Here we must recall Campion's admonition that a person does not become fully Catholic if he is affirming the church's dogmas solely on the grounds that such teachings comport with one's own "reason" or "conviction", but rather, Campion urges that a person must finally assent to the magisterium's precepts through the exercise of "orthodox faith".[47] Campion's claim echoes the Council of Trent's declaration that justifying faith consists of a belief in "those things which God has revealed and promised" – in other words, it is a confessional or dogmatic faith in the truths of revelation, on the authority of God revealing them. In the view of Trent, divine revelation is transmitted through the church's teaching magisterium, and thus the Roman Catechism commissioned by the council insists that "we know not from human reason, but contemplate with the eyes of faith the origin, offices and dignity of the

[46] Ibid.
[47] Campion, "Epistle to Richard Cheney, Bishop of Gloucester, written from Douai in 1572," in Richard Simpson, *Edmund Campion: A Biography*, 511, n. 40.

Church."[48] Approached from this standpoint, Othello has his reasons for thinking that his wife loves him, but his lack of what Campion calls "orthodox faith" in Desdemona's fidelity may have reminded recusant Catholics and church papists in Shakespeare's audience of the role that faith was playing in their own relationship with the Roman church as it continued to be subject to a relentless attack from protestant polemicists.

The charge of unfaithfulness that Iago lays against Desdemona which leads Othello to call her a "cunning whore of Venice" (4.2.91) is an accusation that would have carried a familiar religious resonance for early modern theatergoers. Drawing on the symbolism in Revelation 14, 17, and 18, protestant reformers such as Luther, Tyndale, and Foxe identified the Roman church with the Whore of Babylon as they criticized its worldly corruption and ostensibly heretical teachings. Consequently, the identification between papistry and whoredom became a commonplace in protestant discourse.[49] For Watson, Othello may be "half aware that he has made [Desdemona] into the Whore of Babylon" because he resembles "papists" in his assumption that "her love was to be purchased in the first place, whether with cash or works or words."[50] Alternatively, one can read Othello's shaping of Desdemona into the Whore of Babylon as signifying his repudiation of the Roman Church rather than his embrace of it. Relying solely on reason without possessing sufficient faith as a bedrock for believing in Desdemona's constancy, Othello succumbs to Iago's rational critique, leaving him fulminating like a reformed convert against the "impudent strumpet" (4.2.82) he once took for an honest

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[48] Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, 108

[49] For examples of the "Whore of Babylon" motif being applied to Roman Catholicism in Protestant discourse, see Luther, "Commentary on Psalm 110," 327; Tyndale, *The obedience of a Christen man*, 40; John Foxe, *Actes and monuments*, 1039, 1420, 1627, 1679, 1690; Thomas Cranmer, *An Aunsvvere by the Reuerend Father in God Thomas Archbyshop of Canterbury*, 11, 334, 405; John Jewel, *An Apologie, or aunswer in defence of the Church of England*, 37; William Perkins, *A Reformed Catholike*, 1, 2, 3, 6.

[50] Watson, 77.

bride. After having their own church cast as a whore for decades by protestant polemicists, religious traditionalists in *Othello*'s audience may have found Desdemona's plight echoing their own experience of an accusation they perceived as slander and sympathized with her as a fellow victim.

Here we may further consider how the false accusation of sexual infidelity against Desdemona speaks to her character as a figure for the church, particularly in its Marian aspect. For Christians who viewed Mary as an image of the church, the Virgin's purity was metaphorical for the church's own uncorrupted faith. Augustine, for example, denouncing those who claim Christ was not born of Mary, writes that "in their insanity they appear to themselves to have discovered something contrary to wholesome belief, whereby the chastity of the virgin bride may be corrupted, that is, whereby the faith of the Church may be injured."[51] In the same vein, Hildegard of Bingen asserts that heretics attack the church "by trying to corrupt her virginity which is the catholic faith; she, however, strongly resists them lest she be corrupted for she has always been and is and will remain a virgin."[52] In *Othello*, this relationship between the church's stainlessness and its identity as a truth-speaking person is reflected in the epistemic stakes of Desdemona's purity and her protestations of her faithfulness. We have already seen the enormous stock Othello puts in his wife's fidelity – as he says at one point in the play, she is the "[t]he fountain from the which my current runs / Or else dries up" (4.2.60-61). However, Emilia imbues this matter with a more universal application as she vouches for Desdemona's innocence:

> I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest,
> Lay down my soul at stake: if you think other
> Remove your thought, it doth abuse your bosom.
> If any wretch have put this in your head
> Let heaven requite it with the serpent's curse,

[51] Augustine, "Tractate VIII on the Gospel of John," 117.
[52] Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, 173.

> For if she be not honest, chaste and true
> There's no man happy: the purest of their wives
> Is foul as slander. (4.2.12-19)

By Emilia's estimate, Desdemona is the template for honest wives, and so if she is false, none can be counted pure. Despite Emilia's own willingness to commit adultery, she recognizes the ideal Desdemona upholds, and we can sense this in how she passionately contradicts Othello at every turn following his murder of Desdemona, insisting that she "was heavenly true!" (5.2.133) and "the sweetest innocent / That e'er did lift up eye" (197-98). Thus, when Othello asks Desdemona "what art thou?" (34) and she responds, "Your wife, my lord: your true and loyal wife" (35) – the *truth* of Desdemona's words maintains much more than her own purity. More significantly, it enables the very possibility of virtue in this play, and by resisting Emilia's argument for why a wife might commit adultery in order to gain "all the world" (4.3.74), Desdemona takes the weight of *Othello*'s world on her shoulders.

Behind the charge of unfaithfulness against Desdemona stands Iago, in whom some critics have found a portrait of Jesuit machiavellianism, and whose name recalls Santiago Matamoros, "St. James the Moor-slayer".[53] Although some adherents of the old religion might have identified Iago and his philosophy of the will as a demonization of Jesuits and the "works-righteousness" that protestants attributed to pilgrims seeking St. James' intercession, others among them may have found reason to associate him with the reformers themselves. I want to illustrate this first by briefly showing that a discourse of heresy surrounds Iago and then demonstrating how the distrust he instills in Othello towards Desdemona parallels the critical attitude which the protestant reformers sewed across early modern religious culture towards the roman church. Like their protestant counterparts, Roman Catholic writers viewed heresy as part

[53] See Wilson, 164; Watson, 68-74.

of a satanic plot, as for example when Parsons asks Calvin, "What deuill hath seduced thee . . . ?".[54] In *Othello,* Iago is thoroughly associated with demonic imagery, which comes through the mouths of others against Iago once they discover his villainy, but also by Iago's own self-profession. Not only does Othello call Iago a "demi-devil" (5.2.298) and check to see if the ensign has cloven feet at the play's end (283), but Iago himself makes demonic boasts, saying, "I am not what I am" (1.1.64), explaining that he practices a "Divinity of hell" (2.3.345), and admitting that "When devils will the blackest sins put on / They do suggest at first with heavenly shows / As I do now" (346-48). Also, the language Iago uses in describing his plan to subvert Othello's mind taps into a discourse of heresy-making that was common in early modern religious writing. When Iago first thinks of convincing Othello that Desdemona is having an affair, he exclaims, "I have't, it is engendered! Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light" (2.1.402-403). The association between theological aberration, tolerance thereof, and monstrous births was a familiar feature of reformation writing, and while the image of heresy as a grotesque body would later find even greater usage during the religious chaos of the English revolution, earlier controversialists such as More, Luther, Harding, Jewel, and others utilized it as a powerful motif in their rhetoric.[55] Further, as David Loewenstein observes, anti-heresy texts employed "Tropes of contamination, defilement, disease, plague, and lethal poison"

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[54] See Robert Parsons, *A treatise tending to mitigation*, 58. See also 59, 62, 140, 257. For further examples of Roman Catholics associating protestantism with the devil, see Parsons, *A revievv of ten publike disputations*, 149, 324, 325, 326.

[55] On the association between heresy and monsters, see R. Po-Chia Hsia, "A Time for Monsters: Monstrous Births, Propaganda, and the German Reformation," 67-92; David Loewenstein, *Treacherous Faith*, 217-24. For examples of Roman Catholic writers representing the religious positions of their adversaries as monstrous, see for example, Thomas Harding, A reioindre to M. Iewels replie, 247; Thomas More, "Sir Thomas More to John Cochlaeus," 168; Edmund Campion, *Campian Englished. Or a Translation of the Ten Reasons*, 91, 127; Parsons, *The second part of the Booke of Christian exercise*, 412; William Rainolds, *A Refutation of Sundry Reprehensions,* 85.

to depict spiritual threats against religious orthodoxy.[56] "I'll pour this pestilence into his ear: / That she repeals him for her body's lust" (351-52), Iago connives, and as he later says once his initial suggestions of Desdemona's unfaithfulness begin taking effect on Othello, "The Moor already changes with my poison: / Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons / Which at the first are scarce found to distaste / But with a little art upon the blood / Burn like the mines of sulphur" (3.3.328-32). As a self-styled demoniac who casts his lies in language associated with heteredoxy, Iago may have provoked theatergoers into projecting their own particular fears of heresy onto him, and for adherents of the old religion in the audience, the "poison" Iago spreads could have resonated with the charge against their own church as spiritually unfaithful. When viewed in this manner, the identification of Iago's name with "St. James the Moor-slayer" and his pilgrimage site need not signify the play's indictment of traditional religion, but instead functions as one more example of Iago turning "virtue into pitch" (2.3.355).

For Iago to turn Othello against Desdemona, he must change her from appearing as a "fair warrior" (2.1.180) in Othello's eyes and into a "fair devil" (3.3.482). Following Cassio's drunken brawl during the first night in Cyprus, Iago sets his plan into motion by asking Othello questions that short-circuit the general's hermeneutical assumptions before making declarative statements and transforming them outright. As Iago and Othello walk the ramparts of Cyprus, the conversation turns to Cassio, who, out of shame for his disreputable behavior, is avoiding Othello in the hope that Desdemona will reconcile them. When the two men observe Cassio walking away from Desdemona and Othello asks if that was indeed his disgraced lieutenant that he just saw, Iago's answer is a mix of truth and deception: "Cassio, my lord? No, sure, I cannot

[56] Loewenstein, 31. See for example, Harding, *A reioindre to M. Iewels replie*, 20; Thomas Stapleton, *A returne of vntruthes vpon M. Jewelles replie*, 116, 177; Campion, *Campian Englished*, 68, 140, 143; Parsons, *A treatise tending to mitigation*, 62; Parsons, *A temperate vvard-vvord*, 14, 97; Parsons, *The vvarn-vvord to Sir Francis Hastinges*, 48.

think it / That he would steal away so guilty-like / Seeing you coming" (38-40). Cassio is indeed filled with guilt right now, and he retreats precisely because of it, but Iago is lying here insofar as he knows full well that it was Cassio who just fled Desdemona – Iago, after all, arranged their meeting only moments ago. What is actually at issue is Cassio's interior life, the "why" behind his guilt-ridden evasion. After Othello grants Desdemona's suit that he will pardon Cassio upon his request, Iago redirects their discussion back to Cassio, asking if he knew of Othello's love for Desdemona at the time that he courted her. Seemingly without hesitation, Othello responds, "He did, from first to last" (95) and he demonstrates how much he trusts Cassio and Desdemona when, in reply to Iago's claim that he did not know of their acquaintance, Othello insists, "O yes, and went between us very oft" (100). Iago's simple counters, "Indeed?" (101) and "Honest, my lord?" (104) are ingenious because they do not yet reveal *how* Iago wants to question those things Othello takes for granted, but merely demonstrate that they *can* be questioned.

Agitated with Iago's provocations, Othello demands to know his ensign's thoughts, and Iago momentarily steps back from his strange query, saying, "For Michael Cassio, / I dare be sworn, I think, that he is honest" (127-28). Iago's additional remark, though, only raises more questions: "Men should be what they seem, / Or those that be not, would they might seem none" (129-30). Iago's comment speaks to the difficulty of accessing another person's thoughts and how any claim to knowing someone else's interior is founded upon at least some degree of faith. By making this observation right after he says he thinks Cassio is an honest man, Iago is implicitly drawing attention to the tenuousness of his stated evaluation of Cassio, since according to Iago himself, he can only base it on what Cassio seems to be. Thus, when Othello says that "men should be what they seem" and Iago concludes "Why then I think Cassio's an honest man" (131-32), he is affecting a naivety that he wants Othello to judge as wishful thinking. In his

persistent refusal to reveal his thoughts to Othello, Iago nonetheless hints that they involve someone abusing Othello, even going so far as to use adultery as his example while warning how jealousy can rob someone of peace of mind. As a result, Othello is able to infer the nature of Iago's suspicion and protests that regardless of how attractive Desdemona may be, and how "weak" are his own "merits" (190), he would not "fear or doubt of her revolt" (191) without "proof" (194), and even then, Othello claims, he would be decisive. However, what Othello does not realize, and what Iago will take advantage of, is how his mental state and belief structure can shape what he perceives and accepts as proof. As Iago says upon receiving Othello's handkerchief from Emilia, "Trifles light as air / Are to the jealous confirmations strong / As proofs of holy writ" (3.3.325-27). Thus, Iago will "speak not yet of proof" (199) to Othello, but what he will do is initiate Othello into a hermeneutic of suspicion towards Desdemona that alters what will constitute evidence of her adultery in Othello's eyes. In this way, *Othello* explores the human mystery of how two or more people can assess the same pieces of evidence (biblical verses, for example) and come to very different conclusions about their meaning. What Shakespeare highlights in this play is how these evaluations rarely occur in a vacuum, but within a matrix of relationship and trust between persons, the strength or fragility of which can radically alter how someone perceives a given piece of evidence.

Earlier in the play, when Desdemona takes offense at Iago's misogynistic characterization of Emilia and all other wives as self-serving deceivers, she asks Iago what he might have to say about her, to which he replies, "O, gentle lady, do not put me to't, / For I am nothing if not critical" (2.1.118-19). In making this statement, Iago places his own critical judgment at the core of his being and reveals two of his defining features, which are his distrust and cynicism, especially towards women. Iago has already shown these traits in his dismissal of

"love" (1.3.333) as nothing more than "a lust of the blood and a permission of the will" (335-36). "It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her love to the Moor," Iago tells a stunned Roderigo, since on account of her youth, she will eventually become "sated with his body" and "must have change" (351-52). In Iago's view, the marriage between Othello and Desdemona is mere "sanctimony, and a frail vow betwixt an erring Barbarian and a super-subtle Venetian" (356-57). Naturally, Iago's belief in universal female duplicity touches his own marriage. Claiming he has heard abroad that Othello has slept with Emilia, Iago says, "I know not if't be true, / But I for mere suspicion in that kind / Will do as if for surety," (387-89) – and indeed, this is a suspicion Iago holds against Cassio as well (2.1.305). Always eager to expose an ugly power dynamic lurking below a smooth surface or demystify another person's hallowed assumptions, Iago shows the true depth of his cynicism in his response to Desdemona when she asks what he would say about an idealized wife, "One that in the authority of her merit did justly put on the vouch of very malice itself?" (145-46). After Iago lists the qualities he thinks such a wife should possess, all the while managing to criticize women in the process, Desdemona presses him to explain what he would have this optimal spouse do, and his answer is revealing for what he thinks she is good for: "To suckle fools, and chronicle small beer" (160). Even when he is called upon to imagine an ideal, Iago cannot resist deflating it to the shock of his audience.

Continuing their walk on the ramparts of Cyprus, Iago is eventually granted license to divulge his candid thoughts to Othello, and the cunning ensign again exercises his propensity for criticism:

> Look to your wife, observe her well with Cassio.
> Wear your eyes thus, not jealous nor secure;
> I would not have your free and noble nature
> Out of self-bounty be abused: look to't. (3.3.200-203)

Now executing his subversion of Othello in earnest, Iago purports to expose a pessimistic reality lying beneath the exterior show of Venetian women, and by implication, of Desdemona herself:

> I know our country disposition well –
> In Venice they do let God see the pranks
> They dare not show their husbands; their best conscience
> Is not to leave't undone, but keep't unknown. (3.3.204-207)

Iago's discourse here is consistent with his earlier dismissal of Roderigo's sense of "virtue" (1.3.320) and characterization of housewives as "pictures out of doors" (2.1.109) – as Susan Schreiner observes, "Iago believes that he is the destroyer of false ideas by which humans deceive themselves."[57] By framing his allegations against Venetian wives in general and by implication Desdemona in particular as a benevolent revelation on behalf of Othello's enlightenment and welfare, Iago mirrors the protestant reformers in their calls for the faithful to awaken from papal deception. Shaking off blindness and seeing things as they really are would become a pervasive theme across protestant polemic owing to the nature of the Reformation project, and one exemplary text in this regard is Luther's important letter *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*. In this work, Luther urges Christians to realize that the papacy, through its "three walls" of power over temporal estates, biblical interpretation, and the authority to call a council, had established what amounted to a Roman extortion racket over the German people.[58] Expressing outrage at how licenses, privileges, and other allowances are sold or selectively granted by the pope, Luther asks, "Do the Romanists want us to be so blind to all these things, though we have eyes to see, and be such fools, though we have a perfectly good faculty of reason, that we worship such greed, skullduggery, and pretense?"[59] If Rome will not

[57] Susan Schreiner, *Are You Alone Wise? The Search for Certainty in the Early Modern Era*, 367.
[58] Martin Luther, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, 10-11.
[59] Ibid, 79.

reform, Luther declares that "every decent Christian should open his eyes and not permit himself to be led astray by the Romanist bulls and seals and all their glittering show."[60] Having attacked the papacy's claim as a legitimate ecclesial authority in the *Letter*, Luther's follow-up treatise *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* extends this critique to the Roman church's entire sacramental system. For Johannes Bugenhagen, who would go on to become a zealous devotee of Luther, the tract left an impression akin to the one expressed by Othello, who initially resists Iago's aspersions but soon begins succumbing to them: "This fellow's of exceeding honesty / And knows all qualities, with a learned spirit, / Of human dealings" (3.3.262-64). Following his first reading of *The Babylonian Captivity*, Bugenhagen dismissed Luther as a heretic, but after re-reading it, he was left in a similar awe as Othello, and he remarked of Luther: "The whole world is blind. This man alone sees the truth."[61]

In order to convince Othello that his wife is an adulteress, Iago must make it seem like there is a difference between appearance and reality in Desdemona's behavior. Using examples that Othello himself narrated to the Venetian senate, Iago offers Othello two precedents for deception in Desdemona:

> IAGO She did deceive her father, marrying you,
> And when she seemed to shake, and fear your looks,
> She loved them most.
> OTHELLO And so she did.
> IAGO Why, go to then:
> She that so young could give out such a seeming
> To seel her father's eyes up, close as oak –
> He thought 'twas witchcraft. But I am much to blame,
> I humbly do beseech you of your pardon
> For too much loving you. (3.3.209-14)

[60] Ibid.
[61] Quoted in William Dallmann, *Martin Luther*, 116.

Iago's speech recalls Brabantio's warning to Othello in front of the senate: "Look to her, Moor, if you hast eyes to see: / She has deceived her father, and may thee" (1.3.293-94). Othello's reaction to Brabantio is telling in its omission: he does not defend Desdemona from the claim that she "deceived" her father, but pledges that she would not do the same to him: "My life upon her faith" (295). It is worth noting here the gradation in the examples of Desdemona's alleged deceptions. That Desdemona willfully "deceived her father" in developing a romance with Othello and marrying him behind Brabantio's back seems indisputable. Desdemona implies as much when she admits that Brabantio is "the lord of duty" (184) as her father even if Othello is now her "husband" (185) to whom she currently owes a superior duty. What Desdemona leaves out is that she violated her duty to Brabantio in eloping with Othello and creating the new duty she owes to her husband, which is one facet of the "downright violence" (250) she alludes to shortly thereafter. But if Desdemona did indeed "seel her father's eyes up, close as oak" (3.3.213) as Iago says, how does this compare to the other instance he cites, that "when she seemed to shake, and fear [Othello's] looks, / She loved them most"? (210-11). In this case, Iago refers to an intimate moment between Othello and Desdemona in which he was not present, but which he reinterprets for Othello. However, there is not such a contrast between fear and love as Iago wants to make here. First, if Desdemona "seemed to shake" with "fear" as she listened to Othello's tale, it was not necessarily at his "looks", as Iago claims, but at the tragic sufferings Othello underwent for which Desdemona pitied him. A person can, of course, watch in horror as someone they love is tortured. Once again, Iago is assigning a particular intention to someone when an alternative explanation is available. A seeming discrepancy between exterior and interior does not necessarily imply malice or guilt, and Desdemona herself shows this when she tells Iago, "I am not merry, but I do beguile / The thing I am by seeming otherwise" (2.1.122-23)

as she tries to keep a cheerful demeanor while anxiously awaiting Othello's arrival on Cyprus. If Desdemona's terror at Othello's story was an act on her part, as way of expressing interest in him or enticing Othello, this shows she is willing to employ a bit of affectation in pursuing someone she is attracted to – part of the game of courtship, in other words. Indeed, Othello recognized this quality in Desdemona's coy reaction to his story: "She thanked me / And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her, / I should but teach him how to tell my story / And that would woo her" (164-67). For Othello, Desdemona's feigned interest in some friend of his who could tell Othello's story was not deception on her part, but Desdemona's indirect "hint" (167) that she had fallen in love with him.

In the case of Desdemona's deception of her father, this was indeed a serious violation of his trust. Nonetheless, despite the gravity of this offense, it is not equivalent to adultery for the simple fact that the latter involves the breaking of a *vow*, in which Desdemona pledged *herself* and her fidelity as a kind of touchstone of truth to Othello. As Desdemona professes earlier to the senate, "to his honours and his valiant parts / Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate" (1.3.254-55). But Iago blurs all these distinctions, problematizing Desdemona's coyness and making her appear just as willing to break her wedding vows as she was willing to disobey her father. By leveraging Othello's outsider status against him through disclosing how Venetian wives purportedly deceive their husbands, Iago gains a foothold against the epistemological confidence Othello displayed earlier when he staked his life upon Desdemona's faith. The seed of doubt Iago plants in Othello through his suggestion of Venetian duplicity makes Othello feel like an outsider in his own marriage, thereby allowing Iago to cast a cloud of suspicion in Othello's mind over Desdemona's words and grant a newfound power to the "nature, erring from itself"

(3.3.231) critique which it did not carry for Othello when Brabantio first voiced it in the senate (1.3.100-102).

According to Iago, he would have Othello be "not jealous nor secure" (3.3.201) in his relationship with Desdemona, but merely "observe" (200) her with "suspicion" (224), as if a man observing his wife with suspicion is not already touched with jealousy. As Avery points out, Iago's exhortation "reflects Othello's own mistaken insistence that he can remain open-minded, committed to following the evidence without prior prejudices."[62] The detached scrutiny Iago suggests Othello should take up here may seem like a fair approach in the abstract, but it makes a mockery of Othello's marriage vow to Desdemona and the claims she has upon him as Othello's wife. What becomes painfully clear as the rest of the play unfolds is that by heeding Iago's advice, Othello is not removing a distorting interpretive lens from his eyes as Iago claims, but rather he is adopting one under the guise of a kind of rational skepticism. When Othello concedes Iago's point that Desdemona deceived him during their courtship, sheepishly saying "And so she did" (211), we can perceive a sense of defeat already settling into Othello, and in telling Iago "I am bound to thee for ever" (217), Othello consigns to Iago that portion of his own hermeneutical trust which he should have granted to Desdemona in their wedding vows.[63] Indeed, on Desdemona's side of the marriage, we see just how far she is willing to go in putting a charitable spin on her husband's behavior when she excuses Othello's anger towards her as the result of stress from dealing with state matters (3.4.141), even blaming herself for having "suborned the witness" whom she has "indicted falsely" (154-55). In contrast, following his first

[62] Avery, 277.

[63] Othello's remark to Iago, "I am bound to thee for ever" (3.3.217) foreshadows the dark union the two men will establish later in the play, in which Othello, down on one knee, makes a "sacred vow" (3.3.464) that he will never love again until he revenges himself against Desdemona, whereupon Iago also kneels down, pledges service to Othello, and then tells the general, who has just made Iago his lieutenant, "I am your own for ever" (482).

discussion with Iago about Desdemona, Othello will not attempt to view his wife through Desdemona's eyes, that is, how she herself might wish Othello to look at her. Instead, Othello's instruction to Iago, "If more thou dost perceive, let me know more," (243) indicates how from this moment on, Othello will view Desdemona through Iago's eyes. To be sure, Othello has a few moments in which he seems to resist the thought that Desdemona is unfaithful, as when he says, "If she be false, O then heaven mocks itself, / I'll not believe't" (282-83). Here though Othello is merely saying that if Desdemona is indeed unfaithful, he would believe a fiction of her faithfulness instead of the truth of her infidelity. He is trying to muster enough strength to become the "cuckold" who "lives in bliss / Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger" (170-71). However, Othello also later complains to Iago, "I think my wife be honest, and think she is not, / I think thou art just, and think thou art not" (387-88). This statement seems to approximate the supposed impartiality of Iago's dictum, "Wear your eyes thus, not jealous nor secure" (201), but Othello's follow up is revealing: "I'll have some proof. Her name, that was as fresh / As Dian's visage, is now begrimed and black / As mine own face" (389-91). Othello may want to assess his wife without bias, but his quick transition from claiming he does not know what he should believe to expressing disgust towards Desdemona illustrates the difficulty of judging impartially when the human imagination and its creative energies naturally tend to gravitate towards conceptualizing or justifying one possibility more than another.

For religious traditionalists in the play's audience, Iago's deception of Othello under the pretense of being "not jealous nor secure" may have confirmed them in resisting the critical stance taken by the protestant reformers towards the decrees of the Roman church. Here it is worth comparing Iago's caution to Othello with Calvin's preface for his *Antidote* to the Council of Trent, in which the reformer states:

> The name of SACRED COUNCIL is held in such reverence in the Christian Church, that the very mention of it produces an immediate effect not only on the ignorant but on men of gravity and sound judgment. And doubtless, as the usual remedy which God employed from the beginning in curing the diseases of his Church was for pious and holy pastors to meet, and, after invoking his aid, to determine what the Holy Spirit dictated, Councils are deservedly honored by all the godly. There is this difference, however, – the vulgar, stupified with excessive admiration, do not afterwards make any use of their judgment, whereas those of sounder sense allow themselves, step by step, and modestly, indeed, but still allow themselves to inquire before they absolutely assent. And so it ought to be, in order that our faith, instead of rashly subscribing to the naked decisions of men, may submit to God only. . . . I ask nothing of my readers, however, but to lay prejudice in favor of either party aside, and come unbiassed to the discussion. This they can only do by withdrawing their eye from persons, and fixing it on the subject.[64]

Like Calvin, who asks his readers "to lay prejudice in favor of either party aside" as they hear out his assessment of the church, Iago bids Othello to put aside his biases and neither assume Desdemona's infidelity nor her fidelity. Iago *is* asking Othello to assume the *possibility* of Desdemona's unfaithfulness, just as Calvin is asking his readers to consider the same regarding the church. By swaying his readers into this critical stance, Iago argues that they are removing themselves from the common crowd who, overawed with excessive reverence for councils, abandon their own use of reason and fail to scrutinize the church's decrees before accepting them. Similarly, Iago tells Othello that he wants him to use his own critical faculties in observing Desdemona, not simply assume that she is faithful to him because she is his wife. Calvin wants his readers to resist approaching councils from a standpoint of personal relationship with the church and its magisterium, but simply take up the subject matter of its decrees. This discarding of the personal aspect is implicit in Iago's counsel for Othello to be "not jealous nor secure" towards Desdemona, and yet as Iago well knows, Othello cannot divest himself of this personal element of his relationship with Desdemona as he considers the issue of her fidelity. Iago does not remove the personal component, but poisons it in his initial remarks about the duplicity of

[64] John Calvin, "Acts of the Council of Trent, With the Antidote," 30, 37.

Venetian wives and Desdemona. In doing so, Iago turns the confidence through which Othello's imagination can reconcile her words with fidelity into a doubt that generates possibilities of how Desdemona's speech betrays her, while also making Othello susceptible to the "proofs" (3.3.444) Iago offers against Desdemona. In similar fashion, although Calvin invites the reader to consider his critique of Trent without consideration of its persons, he does not proceed to his analysis of the council's pronouncements without first thoroughly running down the pope, the power dynamics at work in Trent's assembly, and the bishops who composed it. As Calvin says at one point, "if you take away the name of Council, the whole Papacy will confess that all the bishops who attended were nothing but dregs."[65] Like Luther demystifying the papacy before offering biblical passages to argue against its sacraments, Calvin makes it seem absurd for anyone to place trust in the council on a *rational* basis before he then goes on to counter Trent's decrees. But for someone like Campion who advocates placing one's faith in the Holy Spirit's guidance of the Roman church, this means trusting in something that is ultimately intangible – it means placing faith in something like Desdemona's "honour," which, as Iago admits, "is an essence that's not seen" (4.1.16).

If the transformation Othello undergoes from perceiving Desdemona as a faithful wife to later viewing her as an adulteress can be read analogically as him no longer considering her a true church but a false one, so too his murder of Desdemona resembles the religious persecution typical of Shakespeare's age. Initially, Othello's instinct is separation – "If I do prove her haggard, / Though that her jesses were my dear heart-strings, / I'd whistle her off and let her down the wind / To prey at fortune" (3.3.265-67) – and as he first concludes that Desdemona has betrayed him, Othello resigns himself to a kind of resentful toleration: "my relief / Must be to

[65] Ibid, 33.

loathe her" (271-72). However, as Othello is pricked deeper into conviction by Iago's false proofs, tolerance becomes unbearable for him, and he soon craves her physical destruction: "I'll tear her all to pieces!" (434). Following the "sacred vow" (464) Othello makes to take revenge against Desdemona, unstructured slaughter and a desire for her damnation are on his mind (478-81), but Iago eventually steers Othello into what they both agree is a fitting end for her: "Do it not with poison, strangle her in her bed – even the bed she hath contaminated" (4.1.204-205). With this suggestion, Iago crafts Desdemona's death in a manner that it will signify a symbolic representation of her purported crime. In this way, her manner of death begins to recall early modern execution practices, including those against persons deemed heretics, which were designed in such a way that, to use Othello's phrase, "the justice of it pleases" (206). Here I want to highlight several other similarities between Othello's murder of his wife and early modern religious persecution, after which I will examine how Othello fails in his attempt to frame Desdemona's execution as just and briefly consider its implications for the period's religious fragmentation.

When Othello enters his bedchamber to kill Desdemona and he tells himself that "she must die, else she'll betray more men" (5.2.6), Othello is expressing a rationale that allows him to perceive himself as righteous in his action, but it is also a logic that compelled religious violence in the early modern period. That heresy was considered spiritual suicide made it bad enough for the unorthodox, but to allow an obstinate heretic to remain in society put other souls at risk, and consequently, as Brad Gregory observes, it was widely thought that "[t]he spreading of heresy was religious reckless endangerment by spiritual serial killers."[66] Alexandra Walsham reminds us in *Charitable Hatred* that "In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England it was

[66] Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake,* 85-86.

widely believed that persecution of a false religion and its adherents was not merely permissible but, moreover, a laudable and virtuous act of devotion."[67] Those advocating for toleration on principle rather than for persecution were a minority.[68] "Inspired by the thinking of the great patriarch St. Augustine, grounded in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, and supplemented by arguments drawn from past history and recent experience," Walsham explains, the "early modern ideology of religious intolerance" was highly influential throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[69] Stephen Greenblatt observes that in determining to kill Desdemona, Othello adopts a rigorist position on adultery that persisted through the reformation which deems it such a terrible sin that it is worthy of death,[70] but we should note the similarity between the discourse advocating death for adulterers and the same for heretics. George Joye, for example, arguing for a reinstitution of the Old Testament death penalty for adultery, writes that to "take awaye, and to cut of putryfyed and corupte membres from the whole body, lest they poyson and destroye the body, is the lawe of love to the whole body to be preserved."[71]

Like a minister beckoning the condemned to recant at Tyburn, Othello presses his wife to pray and "confess" (53) her guilt, but Desdemona's insistence on her faithfulness to him stands as a rebuke against his effort to frame her death as a "sacrifice" rather than a "murder" (65). Execution of heretics too had a sacrificial component, Walsham observes, and were considered "rituals of atonement and expiation, religious ceremonies intended to appease the wrath of a jealous and intolerant God."[72] David Anderson highlights how Othello "is doing what violence

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[67] Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred,* 39.
[68] Ibid, 49.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning*, 246-47.
[71] George Joye, *A contrarye (to a certayne manis) consultacion*, A5. See also Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning,* 247.
[72] Walsham, *Charitable Hatred,* 75.

demands" in this scene by framing his killing of Desdemona as sanctified, invoking of heaven for his cause, and hiding his wife's body behind the bed curtains: "[Othello] is disguising it, aestheticizing it, and, most potently, sanctifying it."[73] Anderson rightly points to how the play exposes and undermines the logic of sacrificial violence by making Othello's "need to seize interpretive control" of Desdemona's death utterly transparent to the audience, who remain unconvinced of his rationalization, just as Othello himself becomes so after the truth is revealed to him.[74] But here I want to emphasize the ecclesial dimension of the play's ending. If the frustration Othello experiences from Desdemona resisting his definition of her death as a "sacrifice" reflects "the confusion that surrounded sacrificial violence in early modern England" whereby "increasingly acts of sacrificial violence were challenging witnesses with an interpretive problem," as Anderson says, then we should not find it surprising that this crisis of how one interprets religious violence grows out of a problem of interpreting religion itself to which the play is giving voice. In this sense, the fragmentation of a society's collective religious vision will likely lead to some loss of confidence in that society over the righteousness of religious persecution: the first of these is reflected in Othello's misperception of Desdemona as a whore, and the second in Desdemona's contestation of Othello's sacrificial casting of her death. If the audience refuses to go along with Othello in his attributing a sacrificial logic to his plain murder of Desdemona, we likely sympathize with Othello when he stabs Iago and says "Well, thou dost best" (303) in affirmation of Lodovico's call for further violence upon Iago. Only once the audience and characters onstage are at one in the vision that Desdemona was faithful and Othello in error does violence gain a sense of justice in the play.

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[73] David K. Anderson, "The Tragedy of Good Friday: Sacrificial Violence in 'King Lear'," 259-60.
[74] Ibid, 260.

The central religious problem at hand in *Othello*, however, is the issue of how to maintain a unified religious vision in society when each individual has access to a single text which the majority of its population considers divinely inspired. In Othello's failure to maintain communion with Desdemona once his own sense of reason can no longer grasp why or how she has remained faithful to him, the play suggests the fragility of private judgment as a foundation for religious community that is both widespread and sustainable. At the same time, the play foregrounds the influence of personal relationship upon how we reason and perceive evidence, since the less faith we have in someone, the more easily we can be persuaded to view evidence surrounding that person in a different light. In this way, *Othello* casts the problem of early modern religious fragmentation as the result of a decline in interpersonal faith – a force which, when robust, has the power to draw someone toward a specific person or persons and submit to their interpretive conclusions over one's own. "My life upon her faith," (1.3.295), Othello says of Desdemona in the opening act, and yet a grim irony emerges by the play's end, as Othello shows that *he* is the one lacking in faith, a fault for which Desdemona loses her life. Insofar as making an act of faith involves stepping outside of one's own mind and assenting to the conclusions of another, Iago's words to Emilia in the final scene can be read as a chilling hint of Othello's failure on that front: "I told him what I thought, and told no more / Than what *he found himself* was apt and true" (5.2.172-73, emphasis mine). Like the "sword of Spain" (251) he has wielded in countless battles but eventually commits suicide upon, Othello lives and dies by his own reason. Having accepted Desdemona as an honest wife primarily because her love for him comported with Othello's own reason, he then rejects her when he finds Iago's counterarguments *more* amenable to his own reason. But in his wedding vows to Desdemona, Othello was not supposed

to have placed his faith in something he "found himself was apt and true" – he was supposed to have lost himself, and found *another*.

Chapter 4:

"What I Was, I Am": Interpersonal Faith Restored in *The Winter's Tale*

In the final act of *The Winter's Tale*, a courtier informs Leontes that not only has Florizel arrived in Sicilia seeking an audience with the king, but he has brought a captivating princess with him. In awe of Perdita's beauty, the lord describes her allure using imagery that is anachronistic for the play's classical setting, and is more evocative of early modern religious discourse: "This is a creature, / Would she begin a sect, might quench the zeal / Of all professors else, make proselytes / Of who she but bid follow" (5.1.117). For Jacobean theatergoers who had seen England and Europe torn by religious conflict all their lives, these words would have likely struck an intimate chord, conjuring the image of a future when matters of faith would no longer divide Christians. Significantly, the vision reaches beyond a practical tolerance of pluralism, and taps into a deeper longing for confessional unity and the end of religious difference itself. The courtier's use of the term "sect" is appropriate insofar as he imagines Perdita founding her own religious group, but his subsequent description of this movement is strikingly anti-sectarian in its drive towards unanimity. Perdita would not simply attract her own singular throng of devotees and add one more niche to an already disparate religious landscape. Rather, she would convert all others to herself, and move even the most dedicated members of other faiths to abandon their beliefs and follow her. As Camillo recognizes when he encounters Perdita in her "goddess-like" (4.4.10) costume at the sheep-shearing festival, Perdita seems to radiate life itself, prompting Camillo to say, "I should leave grazing were I of your flock, / And only live by gazing" (108-09).

Amid the fractured religious world of Jacobean England, attaining the kind of religious unity that the courtier imagines would have seemed like the stuff of dreams. And yet, Shakespearean Romance, with its fairy-tale quality, *is* the stuff of dreams. Deriving from the

traditions of medieval romance-quests and saints' lives, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* feature common motifs that include separation, exile, seeming death, pastoral, disguises, transformation, the supernatural, and reunion.[1] If bad decisions driven by ambition, pride, and jealousy lead to disaster in the tragedies, the romances insist that ruin need not be final. Although the romances also depict protagonists who make terrible choices, they lead their characters through winding paths of setbacks and suffering, testing their faith and fortitude before ending in forgiveness and reunion. Characters sense a guiding force of providence in their lives, as they come to express wonder at the fantastic events that have occurred and the seemingly miraculous reconciliations they have experienced. What's more, with the exception of *The Tempest*, each play's action spans a long period of time and space, making the final reunions all the more remarkable.[2] By scattering their characters across distant lands and exposing them to setbacks for years, only to reunite them in the end, the romances position their audiences to experience a powerful euphoria that can only come out of dark despair. Shakespeare indulges his audiences' imaginations, positioning them to feel what it is like to witness the possible emerge from what was seemingly impossible.

In Shakespeare's own time, the phrase "a winter's tale," John Pitcher explains, "referred to gossip, outright lies, or to the kind of trivial fairy story that no one but nursemaids and children

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[1] For an exposition of Shakespeare's work in the romance tradition, see Michael O'Connell, "The Experiment of Romance," 215-29. Numerous critics have taken up *The Winter's Tale*'s theme of redemption from different perspectives, including René Girard, "The Crime and Conversion of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*," 193-219; Louis L. Martz, "Shakespeare's Humanist Enterprise: *The Winter's Tale*," 114-131; Maurice Hunt, "'Standing in Rich Place': The Importance of Context in *The Winter's Tale*," *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 38.1/2 (January 1984), 13-33.

[2] O'Connell points out that despite *The Tempest*'s condensed setting on a single island over a few hours' time, the play still manages to elicit the epic scope of other Shakespearean romances, since it "extends its actual story over a dozen years as it condenses this 'backstory' to exposition" (216).

would find entertaining."[3] Like the tale Mamillius begins telling Hermione, these narratives were often filled with "sprites and goblins" (2.1.26), evoking the world of popular superstition that protestant reformers associated with England's medieval past. Told around the fire as entertainment during the winter, they provided an opportunity for domestic self-indulgence, and were both enjoyable and easily dismissible due to their trivial nature. But as Pitcher reminds us, this particular play is not titled "*a* winter's tale" – it is called "*the* winter's tale", making it "the ultimate fanciful story."[4] Synthesizing and building upon criticism that views this as a play deeply engaged with religious controversy, I want to show how in rewriting Robert Greene's *Pandosto* into *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare presents the act of conversion and exercise of interpersonal faith as a means of healing the religious divisions across England and Western Christendom. At the center of *The Winter's Tale* is one king's conversion from a destructive self-directed hermeneutic to one that is other-oriented and restorative, as Leontes submits to the Oracle of Delphi and allows Paulina to guide him in a penitential process that culminates in Leontes reaffirming faith in his wife. *The Winter's Tale* has garnered a reputation among critics for evoking an impression of "wonder" through Hermione's statue coming to life in the final act, but the circumstances surrounding her return leave ample room to doubt whether she ever really died. What makes the queen's ostensible resurrection possible, however, is Leontes's conversion, which is an event the characters may not discuss with the sense of astonishment as they do Hermione's return, but is one which carries an equal sense of the miraculous in this play, albeit of a subtler kind. In *The Winter's Tale*, I argue, Shakespeare shows us how the changing of one's mind can be just as extraordinary as the transformation of stone into flesh.

[3] John Pitcher, Introduction, 25.
[4] Ibid.

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a play that ends with characters kneeling in front of a statue before it comes to life, *The Winter's Tale* has become one of Shakespeare's most important plays for studying religious subtexts in the playwright's work.[5] Critics interested in *The Winter's Tale*'s religious dimension have often viewed the play's use of hermetic discourse and theme of reconciliation as reflecting the Jacobean court's ecumenical aspirations to end Reformation conflict.[6] In its conception of an ancient spirituality that transcends Christian division, hermeticism's *prisca theologia* appealed to those seeking religious peace, to the extent that it has been described as the "international language of tolerance and ecumenism" used across England and Europe at the turn of the seventeenth century.[7] Critical opinion remains divided, however,

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[5] Thomas Rist, for example, argues that Leontes's movement from seeming knowledge to faith enacts the skeptical arguments of Counter-Reformation Pyrrhonists against Protestant claims for individual rationality in *Shakespeare's Romances and the Politics of Counter-Reformation*, 112. David Beauregard argues that the play models Leontes's repentance, admission of guilt, and penance after the Roman Catholic penitential elements of contrition, confession, and satisfaction in *Catholic Theology in Shakespeare's Plays*, 109. Sarah Beckwith views the personal recognitions that conclude *The Winter's Tale* as the play's attempt to recover speech acts that can mediate forgiveness following the Reformation's loss of sacramental confession and absolution in *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 127-46. Phebe Jensen argues that the play's pastoral aspects evoke elements of Catholic festivity that were being erased under a Jacobean reformation of holiday pastimes in *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare's Festive World*, 212. Examining *The Winter's Tale* as a critique of the patriarchal family, Ruth Vanita finds the play appealing to its audience's collective memory of Marian mythology and Henry VIII's familial history in its representation of female fictive kinship and the moral authority wielded by Hermione, Paulina, and Perdita in "Mariological Memory in The Winter's Tale and Henry VIII," 311-17. Gary Waller also discerns Marian motifs scattered throughout the play, not the least of which is the homage that Leontes and others pay to Hermione's statue moments before it is revealed as the flesh-and-blood woman herself in *The Virgin Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Literature and Popular Culture*, 177.

[6] On the play's hermetic imagery, see Frances Yates, *Shakespeare's Last Plays: A New Approach*, 89-91; Douglas Brooks-Davies, *The Mercurian Monarch: Magical Politics from Spenser to Pope*.

[7] James Ellison, "*The Winter's Tale* and the Religious Politics of Europe," 189. As Jill Delsigne explains, "Hermeticism offered an irenic healing of the Reformation schism, either in the form of a reunion of the two faiths or at least a reconciliation achieved by an atmosphere of religious tolerance that would allow both protestant and Catholic scholars to join together in hermetic studies" in "Hermetic Miracles in *The Winter's Tale*," 99.

about just what sort of religious reconciliation *The Winter's Tale* is imagining – a problem encapsulated in the ambiguous nature of Hermione's return at the end of the play, which combines elements of the miraculous, mystical, magical, and theatrical.[8] In the view of Jill Delsigne, the play's syncretism of Catholic hermeticism, sacramental reconciliation, and Pentecostal imagery encourages a "community of affect" among its audience – an experience similar to the "affective piety" which the medieval cycle plays could inspire.[9] Others have found the play advocating a more overtly confessional reunion, if not at least toleration. James Ellison, for example, reads the play within the context of James's own ecumenical efforts to arrange interreligious marriages for his children as well as his appeals for Catholic monarchs to adopt a form of Christianity akin to the Church of England's *via media*. Noting that Sicily was a Catholic country known for its tyrant rulers, Ellison views *The Winter's Tale* as a play in which "Shakespeare puts on stage, in a subtle form, the conversion of a leading Catholic king to something like James's moderate Protestantism."[10] Margaret Jones-Davies also finds *The Winter's Tale*'s ending supportive of a broad-based Christianity, which is an outcome made possible only once Leontes is educated by Paulina in a "magic, hermetic language" and undergoes conversion "from a policy of mistrust to one of faith and belief in the loyalty of his subjects".[11] In Leontes's skepticism and imposition of oaths to secure the fealty of those around him, Jones-Davies discerns a critique of the Oath of Allegiance that James imposed on English

[8] Discussing the ambiguous nature of Hermione's return, Delsigne writes: "This deliberate balance of textual indeterminacy encourages an irenic experience of the play, an uncertainty of whether to interpret the final scene as a Catholic miracle, as an emblem of protestant scepticism of representation, or as an instance of hermetic magic that transcends the divide between Catholics and protestants as part of the *prisca theologia*, an ancient chain of divine wisdom reaching all the way back to the moment when God animated a clay statue to create Adam" (93).
[9] Delsigne, 93, 91.
[10] Ellison, 191.
[11] Margaret Jones-Davies, "'Suspension of Disbelief' in the *Winter's Tale*," 267, 261.

Catholics, while also arguing that the play casts this as an act of tyranny inconsistent with James's otherwise irenic approach.[12] Like Jones-Davies, Alfred Smith perceives parallels between post-reformation England and the oppressive atmosphere Leontes creates in Sicilia, only rather than finding the Sicilian king evocative of James, Smith finds resonance with Henry VIII.[13] Connecting Perdita to English Catholic exiles who found refuge in tolerant Bohemia, Thomas posits that for Shakespeare, "Bohemia provides a third alternative to the ideological polarization of [his] time" between "Protestant and Catholic extremes".[14] Still others such as Aaron Landau, Peter Milward, and Robert Morrison not only view the play as expressing Catholic sympathies, but find it imagining religious reconciliation more on Rome's terms rather than those proposed by James.[15] Such readings are often generated through parallels found between the oracle and the pope, for example, as well as how the climactic statue scene can be viewed as a restoration of Catholic ritual.[16]

In order to frame my own reading of *The Winter's Tale*, I first want to recall Arthur Marotti's observation that "Shakespearean drama is open to interpretation by religiously and politically different audience members in very different ways."[17] For this reason, I am persuaded to think that some protestant theatergoers who were committed to the Church of England's *via media* may have found *The Winter's Tale* imagining a religious reconciliation generally similar to the one posited by Ellison, in which Catholic monarchs, represented by a Sicilian king,

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[12] Ibid, 261-66.
[13] Thomas, 187-210.
[14] Ibid, 215-16.
[15] See Aaron Landau, "'No Settled Senses of the World Can Match the Pleasure of That Madness': The Politics of Unreason in *The Winter's Tale*," 29-42; Milward, *Jacobean Shakespeare*, 73-79; Milward, *Shakespeare the Papist*, 258-264; Robert T. Morrison, *A Tale Told Softly*.
[16] On the pope's association with the oracle, see Milward, *Jacobean Shakespeare*, 75; Morrison, 41-45.
[17] Arthur Marotti, "Shakespeare and Catholicism," 224.

convert to a broad-minded form of Christianity. Considering that James enjoyed being depicted as Apollo, for example, it is plausible to think that one segment of the audience might have viewed Apollo as a "surrogate" for their king, as Ellison suggests, such that "James becomes the Oracle of Europe, the fount of wisdom whom the powers of Europe consult in the times of need, and whom they ignore at their own peril."[18] As Ellison notes, Bohemia's population was largely protestant and ruled by the irenic-minded Rudolf II, and thus a number of protestant theatergoers may have had reason to view the play as signaling a triumph of James's policy through the union of Florizel and Perdita as well as the reconciliation of a penitent Leontes and Polixenes. Indeed, James himself may have understood *The Winter's Tale* in this way, since he reportedly liked the play when it was performed before the court on the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot in 1611.[19]

However, I question how many protestants attuned to the play's religio-political subtext would have missed the many similarities that critics have found between Leontes and Henry VIII, the latter no Sicilian Catholic despot, but a king who garnered a reputation as a tyrant and remained largely Catholic despite his breach with the papacy. While protestants lauded Henry's break with Rome, they had reason to be disgusted with the Tudor king's treatment of his wives, such that they could have found resonance between Hermione and several of Henry's queens, particularly Katherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, and Catherine Howard. Similarly, in Leontes's threat to have Paulina "burnt" (2.3.112) and her reply, "I care not. It is an heretic that makes the fire, / Not she which burns in't" (112-14), protestants in the audience may have been reminded of Henry's persecution of evangelicals. Indeed, Landau explains how Stuart theatergoers may have been especially disposed to notice parallels between Leontes and the Tudor king:

[18] Ellison, 191-92.
[19] Benedikt Höttemann, *Shakespeare and Italy*, 326.

> The first years of James's reign occasioned renewed interest in the history of the Henrician Reformation, too risky a topic during Elizabeth's reign. The period witnessed the coming into vogue of a whole series of Reformation plays about early Tudor history, for example, Dekker and Webster's *Sir Thomas Wyatt* (1602-03), Heywood's *If You Know not Me, You Know Nobody Part I* (1604) and *Part II* (1605), and Samuel Rowley's *When You See Me You Know Me* (1604). Shakespeare himself contributed to the growing fad by participating in a revision of *Sir Thomas More* (1603-04), a play originally written around 1592-93, but censored out of performance and now readily seized upon in order to meet the soaring demand for "Henry VIII plays". A late specimen of this dramatic spate is, of course, Shakespeare's *King Henry VIII or All Is True* (1612-13), the playwright's late attempt at writing English history after a hiatus of more than a decade.[20]

As Mark Rankin observes, by the time James ascended to the English throne, Henry had "emerged in the national imagination as a powerfully transcendent figure, but also a surprisingly topical one."[21] Henry became a point of reference during the oath of allegiance controversy that followed the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot in 1605, as James demanded that his Catholic subjects abjure the "heretical" and "damnable doctrine" that a prince excommunicated by the pope may be deposed or murdered. Although James attempted to distinguish his oath of allegiance from Henry's oath of supremacy by insisting that it did not touch upon matters of faith, the oath's Catholic critics viewed it as an imposition upon their religious beliefs and linked their resistance against it to past opposition towards Henry. For recusant Catholics and church-papists in *The Winter's Tale*'s audience, Leontes's attempts to ferret out a "nest of traitors" (2.3.80) and the crisis of conscience his tyranny generates in Camillo could have resonated with concerns many of them had over James's Oath of Allegiance, but also, Leontes's accusation against his wife and coercion of his subjects may have reminded them of the origin of their

[20] Landau, 30-31.
[21] Mark Rankin, "The literary afterlife of Henry VIII, 1558-1625," 96.

present religious troubles under James, Henry VIII's "great matter".[22] Accordingly, they could have found parallels between Leontes's defiance of the oracle and Henry's dissent from the pope, and in the return of Perdita following Leontes's repentant submission, found a dramatic reversal not far from the one Rome was trying to effect within England. As should be evident, viewing *The Winter's Tale* in relation to their different experiences of the religious crisis means Protestant and Catholic audience members would each have privileged certain associations over alternative meanings and also foregrounded some aspects of the play while downplaying others. Again, if we recall the indeterminate nature of Hermione's resurrection as an example, ambiguity in *The Winter's Tale* does not restrict the play's ability to grant a sense of wish-fulfillment tailored to an individual audience member's unique hopes for religious reconciliation. Rather, ambiguity expands *The Winter's Tale*'s ability to grant this experience of wish-fulfillment to a greater number of people in a diverse religious audience.

What is most relevant for my own purposes in this chapter is how protestant as well as catholic readings of *The Winter's Tale* tend to recognize that *conversion* is a central issue in this work, and indeed, a prerequisite for achieving the play's final reconciliation. Leontes, of course,

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[22] Discussing the number of Catholics in England early in James's reign, Beauregard cites a 1604 report by the Constable of Castile which estimates that they made up as much as one-third of the population. Beauregard also relates how "Matthew, Archbishop of York, complained that Catholics had 'grown mightily in number, favour and influence,' and a similar complaint was voiced in a letter of about the same time: 'It is hardly credible in what jollity they now live. They make no question to obtain at least a toleration if not an alteration of religion; in hope whereof many who before did dutifully frequent the church are of late become recusants" in *Catholic Theology in Shakespeare's Plays*, 19-20. Discussing the Catholic population under James, John Matusiak observes: "The revelation of the real numbers of Catholics in the country when they were allowed to disappear without penalty from the back benches of their Anglican parish churches, and the large numbers now attending Mass, startled even James. Previously, the returns which had been recollected from every diocese of those who officially stayed away from church had led the government to estimate the total number of Catholics at about 8,500. When toleration allowed them into the open, however, it seemed that the papal claim to more than 100,000 was nearer to the mark" in *James I*, 231.

is *the* character who undergoes conversion in this play, but to whom and to what does he convert? In the play's final scene, before Paulina prompts the statue of Hermione to come to life, she tells Leontes and the other onlookers that "It is required / You do awake your faith" (5.3.94-95). Over the first half of the play, Leontes allows a sudden fit of jealousy to rob him of interpersonal faith in Hermione, Polixenes, the Sicilian court, and then finally, the oracle at Delphos. In this way, Leontes's lack of trust in his wife ultimately swells into a lack of interpersonal trust that is religious in its character. Here I want to highlight an insight made by David Beauregard, who observes that in *The Winter's Tale*, "[t]ruth is rooted, not in the autonomous individual, but in the community and a supernatural religious authority."[23] If we are to understand how religious authority operates in *The Winter's Tale*, we must remember that when the scroll sent from Apollo's oracle is read and it vindicates Hermione as a faithful wife, Leontes does not then declare "there is no truth at all in Apollo" – rather, he asserts, "There is no truth at all i'th' oracle" (3.2.137). Leontes thinks he can believe in Apollo without trusting in the oracle, but in rejecting the god's priestess, he is effectively denying Apollo himself. This is a bitter truth Leontes acknowledges after the catastrophic loss of his son and the collapse of his wife, as he cries, "Apollo, pardon / My great profaneness 'gainst thine oracle" (150-151). As the final court of appeal in *The Winter's Tale,* the oracle's pronouncements provide a mechanism whereby human words can be authenticated against Apollo's divine word, and the play depicts its characters' mutual acceptance of this authority as foundational for their ability to experience a shared understanding of reality. Through Leontes's eventual abdication of self-authentication and his submission to the oracle, *The Winter's Tale* presents the rehabilitation of interpersonal faith in a living arbiter of interpretation as a means of overcoming religious fragmentation. Moreover,

[23] Beauregard, 113.

the play shows how an act of interpersonal faith touches on the miraculous in its sacrifice of the self and its ability to transform a person's interpretation of life – the mind itself is being reshaped, and consequently, so too is the world as that mind perceives it.

In *The Winter's Tale*'s opening scene, we find Archidamus and Camillo engaging in a conversation about hospitality that lays the groundwork for the play's presentation of interpersonal trust. Using the inflated rhetoric of courtly language, the two exude generosity toward one another, as they look forward to the coming summer when Leontes will visit Bohemia, and Polixenes's court will play host just as Sicilia has for the last nine months. As they discuss the matter, Camillo makes a point that becomes pivotal for Leontes's coming crisis:

> ARCHIDAMUS: Wherein our entertainment shall shame us, we will be justified in our loves; for indeed –
> CAMILLO: Beseech you –
> ARCHIDAMUS: Verily, I speak it in the freedom of my knowledge. We cannot with such magnificence – in so rare – I know not what to say. We will give you sleepy drinks, that your senses, unintelligent of our insufficience, may, though they cannot praise us, as little accuse us.
> CAMILLO You pay a great deal too dear for what's given freely.
> ARCHIDAMUS Believe me, I speak as my understanding instructs me, and as mine honesty puts it to utterance. (1.1.8-20)

Overwhelmed with the rich hospitality he and Polixenes have been shown in Sicilia, Archidamus is anxious that Bohemia will not have the wealth to reciprocate such "magnificence" when the situation is reversed and his own country will host Leontes.[24] Wanting to clarify that Bohemia's inability to provide equal "entertainment" should not be mistaken for a deficiency in good will on his country's part, Archidamus tells Camillo that the love Bohemia bears Sicilia will settle the difference. Additionally, Bohemia will make their guests drunk so that Sicilia will overlook their

[24] As Ellison notes, the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II, who was Bohemia's ruler from 1576-1611, "was generally known to be short of funds" (182). Ellison cites the report of Fynes Moryson, who visited Prague in 1592 and later complained about the Emperor's inadequacy in showing royal "magnificence" (Ibid).

host's material shortcomings. But as Camillo says, these efforts are unnecessary, since Sicilia's hospitality has been bestowed unconditionally.[25] Consequently, Camillo implies, Sicilia will not be offended if provided with lesser hospitality in Bohemia, understanding that this does not necessarily signify a lack of love on Bohemia's part. By granting this charitable view, Sicilia itself is demonstrating its affection for Bohemia, as it draws from its own reservoir of love to dull its senses and cover over Bohemia's *seeming* lack, just as Archimadus's offer of "sleepy drinks" would. This opening exchange between Archidamus and Camillo foreshadows the interpretive crisis that will dominate the play, in which Leontes observes Hermione treating Polixenes with affection and he suddenly concludes that the two are having an affair. In Archidamus's desire for Sicilia to not "accuse" Bohemia of inhospitality, we find a portent of how Leontes will fail to apply a charitable hermeneutic towards his wife, charging her instead with granting grossly *excessive* hospitality. Whether Camillo is sincere in his insistence on Sicilia's unconditional hospitality or is simply engaging in courteous one-upmanship, his appeal to a gift that is "given freely" resonates with play's treatment of grace, a term that particularly surrounds Hermione, who exudes this quality in both its religious and social senses.

As the two men continue their discussion, Camillo explains why he is so confident Leontes will overlook any shortcomings in Polixenes's hospitality when he visits Bohemia in the coming summer: "Sicilia cannot show himself over-kind to Bohemia. They were trained together

[25] David Reuiter observes that Camillo and Archidamus's respective attitudes toward hospitality reflect Derrida's contrast between an ideal hospitality that is "graciously offered" and a hospitality of "paying up" which exists within economy. See David Ruiter, "Shakespeare and Hospitality: Opening *'The Winter's Tale'*," 160; Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, 83. This moment in the play certainly bears on the subject of gift-giving, but it also touches on an interpretive issue regarding how Sicilia should understand the inferior entertainment Bohemia will provide as host. The gift, in this case, is exegetical good will – a quality Hermione possesses in abundance on account of her surplus of grace, as the play will show.

in their childhoods, and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection which cannot choose but branch now" (21-24). Not only did Leontes and Polixenes grow up together and establish an affectionate bond towards each other, but as Camillo goes on to explain, even after the two friends parted to rule their respective kingdoms, they have sustained their loving connection through the "interchange of gifts, letters, [and] loving embassies," with the result "that they have seemed to be together, though absent; shook hands as over a vast; and embraced as it were from the ends of opposed winds" (28-31). Given this deep bond and history of friendship which the two kings have established among one another, Camillo believes that Leontes will interpret any deficiency in Polixenes's entertainment in the best possible light. Commenting on the love between the two kings, Archidamus goes even further, saying, "I think there is not in the world either malice or matter to alter it" (32-33). In Leontes's twisted construal of Polixenes and Hermione's warm courtesy during the following scene, quite the opposite happens, but not before Polixenes shows us how he is willing to be persuaded out of his *own* nagging suspicions for the sake of his longtime friend.

The second scene opens with Polixenes preparing to return to Bohemia, telling Leontes that it has now been nine months "since we have left our throne / Without a burden" (1.2.2-3). Trying to explain why he must finally leave for home the next day, Polixenes says:

> I am questioned by my fears of what may chance
> Or breed upon our absence, that may blow
> No sneaping winds at home to make us say
> This is put forth too truly. Besides, I have stayed
> To tire your royalty. (11-15)

The issue is again one of trust. Having been gone for so long, Polixenes has begun worrying about what might be happening in Bohemia in his absence, an anxiety whose circumstances seem reasonable in comparison to Leontes's later paranoia that his subjects have been plotting

against his "life" and "crown" right under his nose (2.1.47). After failing in his own attempts to convince Polixenes to stay longer, Leontes encourages Hermione in this endeavor, and she suggests to her husband that he "Tell [Polixenes] you are sure / All in Bohemia's well; this satisfaction/ The bygone day proclaimed. Say this to him, / He's beat from his best ward" (1.2.30-33). In a subtle way, Hermione's instruction prefigures the play's remedy for Leontes's own imminent crisis: she would have Polixenes let go of his private apprehension and accept the witness and word of another.

After Hermione continues prodding Polixenes and convinces him to remain in Sicilia awhile longer, Polixenes recalls his childhood together with Leontes, which he fondly looks back on as a state of youth that was practically pre-lapsarian in its innocence. "We were as twinned lambs that did frisk i'th' sun / And bleat the one at th'other," he tells her, "what we changed was innocence for innocence; we knew not / The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dreamed / That any did" (67-71). Ellison observes that this description is more Catholic than Calvinist in its assumption that "through the workings of grace children really could be in a state of innocence," but what I would like to emphasize is this passage's thematic relevance to the larger structure of the play.[26] Polixenes is looking back on a time in his life when trust would have come more easily for him and Leontes on account of their youthful naivety – as he says, they "knew not / The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dreamed / That any did" – and it is just such child-like trust to which Leontes will be called to return by the end of the play. As for what caused the two friends to fall from their utopian state, Polixenes implies that his wife and Hermione are to blame. In her response to Polixenes, Hermione calls upon "Grace" (80) and introduces the topic of marital fidelity that becomes crucial to the plot, as she tells Polixenes that his reasoning is unsound, but even if the

[26] Ellison, 182.

charge was accurate, the two wives would be willing to answer for their husbands' "offences" (83) so long as Leontes and Polixenes have not "sinned" (84) with anyone else.

Seeing that Hermione has persuaded Polixenes to stay, Leontes tells his wife that only "once" (89) has she spoken "To better purpose" (88) than she did just now – it was when she clasped her "white hand" (103) to Leontes's own and told him, "I am yours for ever" (105). According to Hermione, it was "grace indeed" (105) that was behind this promise, which she identifies as an "elder sister" (98) to her use of speech in persuading Polixenes to stay in Sicilia longer: "Why, lo you now, I have spoke to th' purpose twice. / The one for ever earned a royal husband; / Th'other for some while a friend" (106-108). Hermione's delineation of these two speech acts and association of each with grace underscores the point she will insist upon later during her trial, which is that these are two distinctly different types of relationships, one the love of a spouse, the other the love of a friend, both of which she has honored without fail:

> For Polixenes,
> With whom I am accused, I do confess
> I loved him as in honour he required;
> With such a kind of love as might become
> A lady like me; with a love, even such,
> So, and no other, as yourself commanded;
> Which not to have done, I think, had been in me
> Both disobedience and ingratitude
> To you and toward your friend, whose love had spoke
> Even since it could speak, from an infant, freely
> That it was yours. (3.2.60-70)

The line between friendly and romantic love loses its distinction for Leontes the moment Hermione takes Polixenes by the hand, though, when Leontes suddenly mutters to himself, "Too hot, too hot! / To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods. I have *tremor cordis* on me. My heart dances, / But not for joy, not joy" (1.2.108-111). A moment earlier, Leontes recalled how he and Hermione joined hands when they agreed to marry, and now it is as if Leontes has unwittingly

carried that same romantic context over to the hand-holding he is seeing between his wife and old friend. The problem with the running commentary Leontes expresses towards Hermione and Polixenes's interaction, beginning with their "paddling palms and pinching fingers," (115) is that he attributes a narrow sexual or deceitful meaning to these actions when there are alternative interpretations available – ones that are more consistent with Leontes's history with these two, and more decisively, Hermione's promise to Leontes, "I am yours for ever" (105). Howard Felperin notes that "much of what Hermione says may be construed either within or outside the conventions of royal hospitality and wifely decorum."[27] Here I would emphasize that the importance of Hermione's promise to Leontes, "I am yours for ever" (1.2.105) becomes clear when we consider Leontes's complaint, "To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods" (109). If Hermione and Polixenes's friendship was a merely perfunctory one, Leontes would hardly need to exercise his trust in her, because the signifiers emanating from the two's interaction would be more solely indicative of a platonic relationship. Instead, through their physical affection and use of a gracious *sprezzatura* of courtly puns, Hermione and Polixenes play along the limits of friendship (they "mingle friendship far") *without* "mingling bloods", and in doing so, they expose the shallow limits of Leonte's trust in them. Like the love that Camillo says will be freely provided to cover over Bohemia's inferior entertainment, faith supplies good will to fill in gaps of meaning when faced with ambiguous signifiers. Indeed, the greater the faith, the more there is a willingness to strain a charitable sign out of a seemingly hostile signifier, as when Hermione attempts to dismiss Leontes's initial antagonism towards her. Hermione's charitable reaction to Leontes's open hostility is a telling contrast against his own aggressive interpretation of her more ambiguous words and actions. When Leontes witnesses the warm interaction between Hermione

[27] Felperin, 44.

and Polixenes, he interprets their "play" (189) with deadly seriousness and in a sexual manner. Conversely, when Leontes demands his son Mamillius be separated from Hermione and regrets that the child shares his mother's looks, Hermione grants Leontes a facetious interpretation, and takes this as mere play, or "Sport" (2.1.58). Further, when Leontes says to his pregnant wife, "Polixenes / Has made thee swell thus" (62), Hermione simply deflects his accusation: "But I'd say he had not, / And I'll be swordn you would believe my saying, "Howe'er you lean to th'nayward" (62-64). Even after Leontes rails against Hermione and proclaims her an outright "adulteress" (78), she respectfully dissents without impugning his character: "Should a villain say so, / The most replenished villain in the world, / He were as much more villain – you, my lord, / Do but mistake" (78-81).[28] By drawing from her own surplus of grace to try and save an unwilling Leontes from his error, Hermione shows that she indeed has "grace to boot" (1.2.80).

If Hermione stretches the possibilities of meaning in an attempt to reconcile Leontes's violent rhetoric with her prior experience of him as a loving husband and respected king – a perception of him that Hermione shares with the Sicilian court, as well – then Leontes constricts the possible meaning of signifiers so that they conform to a crude obsession held by him alone. "Leontes has no difficulty observing signifiers," as Adam Anderson says, but "it is in the creation of a sign, in the amalgamation of signifier and signified into one linguistic unit, that his madness becomes apparent and, eventually, dangerous."[29] It is on the level of signs that Leontes departs

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[28] Albeit in a much more serious context, Hermione is here applying a similar interpretational guideline as Olivia does in *Twelfth Night* when she tells Malvolio that an "allowed fool" should be given the benefit of the doubt that he is not practicing "slander," even if he seems to be doing so, just as a proverbially "discreet man" should not be understood as "railing," but merely offering measured reproof. Like Olivia, Hermione's initial reactions to Leontes are charitable attempts to reconcile his volatile words with her perception of him as a loving husband. We find Desdemona doing the same in *Othello*, too, when she makes every excuse for her husband's abuse.

[29] Adam Anderson, "Signifier, Signified, and the Nature of Madness in *The Winter's Tale*," 105.

from communion with his wife and his subjects, such that Leontes becomes a tyrannical ruler by eschewing the public, shared understanding of Hermione's character and imposing a privatized vision of his sole imagination onto his subjects. Thus, when Leontes is at the height of his paranoia and is levelling his crazed accusations during Hermione's trial, his wife can only say, "Sir, You speak a language that I understand not" (3.2.78). As Mary Ann McGrail observes, "In the first and second scenes our attention is drawn to language, to its unreliability, to its ambiguities, as Leontes becomes obsessively concerned with narrowing down meaning."[30] We see this in how Leontes applies a strictly sexual interpretation to a word like "satisfy" (1.2.232), for example, or when Leontes is about to wipe his son's smudged face and he says to Mamillius, "Come, captain, / We must be neat – not neat, but cleanly, captain" (1.2.122-23). Realizing that "neat" not only means cleanliness, but that it can also signify cuckoldry, Leontes compulsively corrects himself with a word that he feels is more precise. In this way, once Leontes begins yielding to his suspicion, his entire semiotics becomes obsessed with the thought of adultery.

That Leontes's newfound hermeneutic of suspicion is at odds with the court's more trusting hermeneutic of charity becomes evident when he discusses Polixenes and Hermione with his close confidant, Camillo. As Camillo relates the plain facts of how Hermione persuaded Polixenes to stay longer, Leontes's suspicion causes him to misunderstand Camillo and wrongly infer that his counselor along with the rest of the court have already been aware of Hermione's infidelity for some time. Even though Leontes has not yet broached the idea of Hermione's infidelity to Camillo, who remains in the dark as to why the king is upset with him, Leontes expresses his frustration towards this man who has been his counselor for so long, and says that either Camillo is "not honest" (240), "a coward" (241), "negligent" (245), or "a fool" (245) – in

[30] Mary Ann McGrail, *Tyranny in Shakespeare*, 95.

other words, Leontes considers every possibility except the one where he himself is wrong. Significantly, Camillo cedes that he "may be negligent, foolish and fearful" (248), but what he insists upon is that he is not dishonest. Camillo's point is important in how it demarcates a difference between a hermeneutic of suspicion and a hermeneutic of charity, insofar as the former assumes malice in others and the latter does not. Indeed, we find this point made later when Leontes spits at his court, "You're liars all!" (2.3.144) and one lord responds, "Beseech your highness, give us better credit. / We have always truly served you, and beseech / So to esteem of us" (144-47). But once Leontes explicitly tells Camillo, "My wife's a hobby-horse" (274) and demands that his advisor likewise "Say't, and justify't" (276), the two have an exchange that shows just how far-gone Leontes has become in his delusion:

> CAMILLO
> I would not be a stander-by to hear
> My sovereign mistress clouded so without
> My present vengeance taken. 'Shrew my heart,
> You never spoke what did become you less
> Than this; which to reiterate were sin
> As deep as that, though true.
> LEONTES Is whispering nothing?
> Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?
> Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career of laughter with a sigh? – A note infallible
> Of breaking honesty. Horsing foot on foot?
> Skulking in corners? Wishing clocks more swift?
> Hours, minutes? Noon, midnight? And all eyes
> Blind with the pin and web but theirs, theirs only,
> That would unseen be wicked? Is this nothing?
> Why then the world and all that's in't is nothing,
> The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
> My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings,
> If this be nothing. (277-294)

Leontes will soon declare, "If I mistake / In those foundations which I build upon, / The centre is not big enough to bear / A schoolboy's top" (2.1.100-103). Here in his crazed reaction to Camillo's rebuke, we see the catastrophic results for Leontes's world if that foundation proves

faulty. Hermione's adultery is now a fundamental epistemological reference point for Leontes, from which the rest of the world and its intelligibility flows. He is not merely willing to stake his life on Hermione's adultery, but existence itself, because for Leontes, his wife's falsity is now his criterion of truth. Leontes may be left with an existing world if Hermione is faithful, but that world would be incomprehensible to him in light of what he has seen, and since Leontes equates his own judgment with reality, that world would be nothing to him. And yet, what has he seen? Leontes's apodictic recital includes actions his anxious imagination has misinterpreted or simply generated out of itself. Earlier, Leontes displays self-awareness when he acknowledges the mind's ability to envision things that are purely imaginary: "With what's unreal thou coactive art, / And fellow'st nothing" (1.2.141). But that distinction becomes lost on Leontes in his response to Camillo. Gone is the acknowledgment that his mind could imagine something that is not real, or that something could exist which he does not understand. Instead, Leontes now arrogates to his own mind the power to create and destroy.

In Leontes's urging of Camillo to affirm Hermione's guilt and his directive that if he had "servants true" (307) then they would dispatch Polixenes, we begin to see the practical political consequences of the king's madness for the rest of the court. As Camillo succinctly observes, Leontes is "one / Who in rebellion with himself will have / All that are his so too" (351-53). Camillo's eventual response to Leontes, "I must believe you, sir. / I do, and will fetch off Bohemia for't" (331-32) as well as his profession, "I am [Polixenes's] cupbearer. / If from me he have wholesome beverage, / Account me not your servant" (342-44) demonstrates the equivocation that Camillo will now practice in order to square his obedience to Leontes with his own conscience, since Camillo will facilitate Polixenes's escape from Sicilia rather than killing him, and instead of bringing Polixenes a safe drink, Camillo will now flee from service to

Leontes. Following Camillo and Polixenes's flight from Sicilia, though, those who are left in Leontes's court must suffer under what Paulina will call his "tyrannous passion" (2.3.27). When Leontes publicly accuses Hermione and has Mamillius taken away from her, he dictates how the court is to understand what they are seeing: "You, my lords, / Look on her, mark her well. Be but about / To say she is a goodly lady, and / The justice of your hearts will thereto add / 'Tis pity she's not honest, honourable" (2.1.64-68). Like the oracle's solemn pronouncement later on, Leontes speaks as though his word itself authenticates truth from falsehood: "I have said / She's an adulteress, I have said with whom" (87-88). In this way, the entire court is swept up in the matter, and any who defend Hermione are thereby "guilty" (104). Nevertheless, several of those in the Sicilian court try to defend Hermione, and the epistemological stakes surrounding her innocence begin to echo those voiced by Emilia about Desdemona's fidelity in *Othello*. Not only does one of the lords stake his life on Hermione's purity (131), but just afterwards, Antigonus asserts that "If it prove / She's otherwise, I'll keep my stables where / I lodge my wife; I'll go in couples with her; / Than when I feel and see her, no farther trust her, / For every inch of woman in the world, / Ay, every dram of woman's flesh, is false / If she be" (133-39). As Antigonus indicates, Hermione's fidelity creates the possibility for others to "trust" more than what they can "feel and see" themselves. And yet, despite this profession of trust in Hermione, Antigonus himself eventually loses faith in her and concludes that Perdita is not the child of Leontes, but "the issue / Of King Polixenes" (3.3.43) – a fault on Antigonus's part which may be just as relevant to his gory fate as is his leaving the newborn Perdita helplessly exposed to the elements. Antigonus ultimately lacks the zealous belief in Hermione's purity that we find in his wife Paulina, who is willing to suffer Leontes's wrath in order to stand up for Hermione and Perdita. When Leontes's threatens that he will have Paulina "burnt" (2.3.112) and she retorts, "It is an

heretic that makes the fire, / Not she which burns in't" (113-14), Paulina frames her belief in Hermione's innocence as an orthodox faith that is being persecuted by the king's heterodoxy, which is fitting for this character of Shakespeare's own creation whose name echoes the biblical apostle. Paulina may say to Leontes "I'll not call you tyrant" (114), but the statement itself inescapably associates him with tyranny, as does Paulina's follow-up: "But this most cruel usage of your queen, / Not able to produce more accusation / than your own weak-hinged fancy, something savours / Of tyranny" (115-18). Only after the oracle declares Leontes a "tyrant" (3.2.131) and the king contravenes the Delphic message does Paulina categorically identify Leontes as one, and once he loses Mamillius and Hermione, Leontes himself is willing to agree, as he implores Paulina, "Go on, go on. / Thou canst not speak too much. I have deserved / All tongues to talk their bitterest" (211-13).

If Leontes seeks affirmation of Hermione's infidelity from his trusted advisor Camillo and the Sicilian court, he does so only to further reinforce what he already thinks, immediately discounting what they have to say when they disagree with him. As Leontes says when he grows tired of arguing with them, "We need no more of your advice. The matter, / The loss, the gain, the ordering on't, is all / Properly ours" (2.1.168-70). Nevertheless, Leontes sends Cleomenes and Dion to the oracle "for a greater confirmation" (180) of Hermione's adultery than his own word, and even gives the impression that he will abide by its judgment no matter what: "Now from the oracle / They will bring all, whose spiritual counsel had, / Shall stop or spur me" (185-87). But even here we see a foreshadowing of what will soon become Leontes's dissent, as he goes on to say, "Though I am satisfied, and need no more / Than what I know, yet shall the oracle / Give rest to th' minds of others; such as he / Whose ignorant credulity will not / Come up

to th' truth" (190-93). Leontes clearly considers the oracle necessary only for the weak-minded, whereas his own belief is sufficient for himself.

Shakespeare's treatment of the oracle at Delphos includes important changes he makes to his source material and has significant consequences for my own reading of *The Winter's Tale*. In *Pandosto,* the queen Bellaria requests that an appeal be made to Apollo on the question of her purported adultery, and Pandosto accepts this request, sending a band of noblemen to consult the oracle and return with the decision. Once they arrive at Delphos, they immediately proceed to the temple, where they offer sacrifice to Apollo and gifts to the priest. After kneeling at the altar for a short time, they are directed by the oracle to a scroll with Apollo's answer, which is taken back to Bohemia and read publicly, vindicating Bellaria.[31] In Greene's prose romance, the king instantly regrets his accusation upon hearing the oracle's message and frantically begins trying to undo the damage he has inflicted upon his friends and family, only to then be told that his young son, Garinter, has suddenly died, which then brings on the swift death of the queen.[32] In *The Winter's Tale*, though, the temple at Delphos leaves a lasting impression on the men Leontes sends there, such that Cleomenes and Dion are still discussing it when they arrive back in Sicilia:

> CLEOMENES:
> The climate's delicate, the air most sweet,
> Fertile the isle, the temple much surpassing
> The common praise it bears.
> DION: I shall report,
> For most it caught me, the celestial habits –
> Methinks I so should term them – and the reverence
> Of the grave wearers. O, the sacrifice,
> How ceremonious, solemn and unearthly

[31] See Robert Greene, *Pandosto*, 417-18.
[32] As in *The Winter's Tale*, the young boy's death appears to be due to the wrath of Apollo, but why should Garinter die at the moment of his mother's exoneration in Pandosto? Considering that Pandosto accepts the oracle's judgment, it may be that Apollo strikes the boy dead not because Pandosto defies the oracle (he does not), but because the king has allowed his obsessive jealousy to drive him so far as to need to consult Apollo on the matter at all.

It was i'th' offering!
CLEOMENES: But of all, the burst
And the ear-deafening voice o'th' oracle,
Kin to Jove's thunder, so surprised my sense
That I was nothing. (3.1.1-11)

The visual splendor of the temple worship is what affects Dion, but for Cleomenes, the communication of Apollo through the oracle leaves him thunderstruck. As we saw during his talk with Camillo earlier, Leontes repeatedly reduced the world around him to "nothing" if it did not conform to his view that Hermione is an adulteress (1.2.282-94). In Cleomenes's encounter with the oracle, the situation is reversed – Cleomenes's "sense" (3.1.10) is so "surprised" (10) by the oracle's overwhelming voice that he is reminded of his own epistemological limitations, and shrinks to "nothing" (11). This is what happens to the king in Greene's tale, when Pandosto recants his error as soon as the oracle's scroll is read. Shakespeare departs from *Pandosto*, though, by having Leontes reject the message from Apollo's priest, which reads: "*Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten, and the king shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found*" (3.2.130-133). Unlike classical depictions of the oracle, which represent its pronouncements as cryptic, there is no ambiguity here, and its function seems to be to clarify. Commenting on the oracle's revelation, McGrail claims that "the charge of tyranny is given supreme authority here because it comes from the gods."[33] I concur with McGrail that Leontes's tyranny is manifested primarily through his "presumption to know the other and judge the other on their innermost thoughts and feelings" as well as Leontes's insistence "that everyone else, including the gods, not only accept but vindicate his interpretation."[34] What Leontes needs, McGrail rightly says, is something other than "an utter conviction of his own interpretative powers" that can nonetheless satisfy his desire

[33] McGrail, 91.
[34] Ibid, 101, 99.

for certainty and "allow him to act without a certain knowledge that it is impossible for him to have."[35] McGrail argues that the play suggests religious faith as a potential check against tyranny, but here I would differ from Mcgrail and emphasize that it is not Apollo *per say* whom Leontes denies, but the deity's oracle. The religious faith that Leontes lacks is not belief in a god, but a religious faith that is interpersonal in nature, one that trusts that the deity has granted a specific living person or persons the ability to authenticate what that god is saying.

Here I want to offer a particular explanation for why it is the death of Leontes's son following the king's defiance of the oracle that causes Leontes to suddenly cry out, "Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves / Do strike at my injustice" (143-44). When Leontes is first overcome with paranoid jealousy in the second scene of the play, he looks at Mamillius and asks him, "Art thou my boy?" (1.2.120) Given Leontes's sudden mistrust of Hermione, the question is understandable, since Leontes now believes he must re-evaluate everything about his relationship with his wife. Mamillius, of course, says, "Ay, my good lord" (120), but his reply hardly resolves the question for Leontes. Perceiving himself as a cuckold, Leontes now asks Mamillius, "Art thou my calf?" (127) and the boy again affirms it. However, Leontes remains unsatisfied, and broods further:

> Thou want'st a rough pash and the shoots that I have
> To be full like me. Yet they say we are
> Almost as like as eggs – women say so,
> That will say anything. But were they false
> As o'erdyed blacks, as wind, as waters, false
> As dice are to be wished by one that fixes
> No bourn 'twixt his and mine, yet were it true
> To say this boy were like me. (128-35)

[35] Ibid, 101, 99. Felperin draws the connection between Leontes's self-centeredness in the first half of the play and the passionate trust he enacts in the latter half, remarking that Leontes's jealousy is not "the absence, but the dark side of his faith" (16). One might say that the "light side of his faith" is Leontes's faith in the Other.

Leontes begins by noting a difference between Mamillius and himself, and then recalls that others have said the two look almost exactly alike. Leontes's reference to "they" opens the possibility of the king stepping outside himself and accepting the judgment of another, and yet, those who say this are women, whom Leontes does not trust. Leontes finally resolves that Mamillius is indeed his son, apparently not on account of what anyone else says, but because in the king's final judgment, the boy does look like him. Like Othello's initial affirmation of Desdemona's fidelity, Leontes is acknowledging a truth here, but on terms that the play is suggesting are insufficient. If Leontes reduces to "nothing" (2.3.291-94) anything that does not align with his own understanding, as I have claimed, he likewise behaves as if that which is true or exists does so solely because he has judged it as such. What the death of Mamillius does is shatter this delusion in the king, as this boy he has identified as his own and cherished as his heir is reduced to nothing quite independently of Leontes's own imaginative powers.

After witnessing the death of Mamillius and collapse of Hermione immediately thereafter, Leontes says "I have too much believed mine own suspicion" (3.2.148). In an instant, Leontes's view of himself and the world around him transforms:

> Apollo, pardon
> My great profaneness 'gaint thine oracle.
> I'll reconcile me to Polixenes,
> New woo my queen, recall the good Camillo,
> Whom I proclaim a man of truth, of mercy;
> For being transported by my jealousies
> To bloody thoughts and to revenge, I chose
> Camillo for the minister to poison
> My friend Polixenes, which had been done,
> But that the good mind of Camillo tardied
> My swift command. (150-160)

Not only does Leontes experience a complete shift in how he views the oracle, Hermione, Polixenes, and Camillo, but that change empowers his imagination to generate a new narrative for understanding Camillo's flight from Sicilia:

> Though I with death and with
> Reward did threaten and encourage him,
> Not doing it and being done, he, most humane
> And filled with honour, to my kingly guest
> Unclasped my practice, quit his fortunes here
> Which you knew great – and to the certain hazard
> Of all incertainties himself commended,
> No richer than his honour. How he glisters
> Through my rust! And how his piety
> Does my deeds make the blacker! (160-169)

Earlier when Leontes is told that Camillo and Polixenes departed the court together, the only reason Leontes can imagine for why his counselor left with Polixenes is because Camillo was "his pander" (2.1.46). Polixenes's possible innocence and Camillo's agreement to poison the Bohemian king were not even considered by Leontes in his attempt to understand why Camillo fled. Now, however, a completely different rationale dawns upon Leontes for why his counselor left Sicilia. His explanation is a more informed account of the charitable interpretation asserted earlier by Hermione, who, unaware that Leontes had directed Camillo to poison Polixenes, nonetheless said at her trial, "All I know of it / Is that Camillo was an honest man; / And why he left your court the gods themselves, / Wotting no more than I, are ignorant" (3.2.72-75).

After the apparent death of Hermione, Leontes is left only to mourn his son and wife, upon whose grave will be written the "causes of their death" to the king's own "shame perpetual" (3.3.234-35). "Once a day I'll visit / The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there / Shall be my recreation," he resolves, "So long as nature / Will bear up with this exercise, so long / I daily vow to use it" (235-239). The word "recreation" is aptly used here, because now that Leontes's mind has been recreated through his newfound faith in the oracle, his sorrowful tears will restore the

communal ties that have been destroyed by his pride. The figure of Time tells us that sixteen years pass by following these events in Sicilia, during which time Leontes's disavowed child, Perdita, has "grown in grace" (4.1.24) in Bohemia, raised as a shepherdess while ignorant of her royal heritage. We also learn that she and Polixenes's son, Florizel, have developed a secret relationship with one another and fallen in love, even though both know that Polixenes will not approve a marriage between his son and a woman seemingly so far below his station. At a sheep-shearing festival hosted by Perdita, Florizel assures her of his chaste intentions and that he will not let his "lusts / Burn hotter than [his] faith" (4.4.33-34). Perdita is concerned, however, and responds, "O, but sir, / Your resolution cannot hold when 'tis / Opposed, as it must be, by th' power of the king. / One of these two must be necessities, / Which then will speak that you must change this purpose, Or I my life" (35-40). Polixenes will inevitably find out about their love, Perdita points out, and when that happens, Florizel must either change his intentions towards Perdita or his father will kill her. Despite Perdita's concern, though, Florizel remains undaunted, and tells her:

> Thou dearest Perdita,
> With these forced thoughts I prithee darken not
> The mirth o'th' feast – or I'll be thine, my fair,
> Or not my father's. For I cannot be
> Mine own, nor anything to any, if
> I be not thine. To this I am most constant,
> Though destiny say no. Be merry, gentle;
> Strangle such thoughts as these with anything
> That you behold the while. Your guests are coming.
> Lift up your countenance as it were the day
> Of celebration of that nuptial which
> We two have sworn shall come. (40-51)

In what can be read as a counter-movement against Leontes allowing his own "forced thoughts" about Hermione's imagined inconstancy to "darken" what should be his joyful hosting of Polixenes at the start of the play, Florizel tells Perdita that she must not give in to doubt, insisting

that he will always belong to her. That we should consider this new generation's relationship in juxtaposition to that of Leontes and Hermione becomes clear later during the festival, when in the presence of a disguised Polixenes and Camillo, Florizel professes his love for Perdita, declaring, "I take thy hand, this hand / As soft as dove's down and as white as it, / Or Ethiopian's tooth, or the fanned snow that's bolted / By th' northern blasts twice o'er" (367-70). The moment recalls Leontes's recollection of when he took Hermione's "white hand" and told her, "I am yours for ever" (1.2.105). Soon enough, though, Florizel's own "faith" (4.4.35) is put to the test, as he asks Polixenes and Camillo, both disguised, and the shepherd who has raised Perdita to be witnesses to their betrothal, only for Polixenes to reveal himself and threaten both Perdita and the shepherd with death if they ever see Florizel again.

After Polixenes storms off, Perdita despairs of Florizel's ability to marry her, but the circumstances have done nothing to deter Florizel, who tells her, "I am but sorry, not afeard; delayed, / But nothing altered. What I was, I am, / More straining on for plucking back, not following / My leash unwillingly" (468-71). Despite the seemingly impossible circumstances, Florizel is not just undeterred in his intention to marry Perdita, but more resolved than ever before. Perdita further bemoans how Florizel cannot keep his pledge now that Polixenes has discovered them, but the prince tells her, "It cannot fail but by / The violation of my faith, and then / Let Nature crush the sides o'th' earth together, / And mar the seeds within" (481-84). Renouncing his succession to Polixenes, Florizel declares he is now "heir" to his "affection" (484-85). Like Leontes, who earlier in his madness staked the world's existence on his conviction that Hermione had *broken* faith with him, Florizel now does the same but in reverse, putting the weight of the world on his *keeping* faith with Perdita. Not willing to be "advised" (486) by a dissuading Camillo but rather following his own "fancy" (487), Florizel embraces this "madness"

(488) which Camillo calls a "desperate" (490) enterprise. "So call it," Florizel replies, "but it does fulfil my vow" (490-91). Unlike the lunacy of Leontes, which drove the king to *break* faith with Hermione, Florizel's madness is generative, that of a lover determined that he will somehow be able to miraculously *make good* on his word against all odds. And indeed, Florizel's conviction pays off, as Camillo sees that the prince is determined to head off to sea with Perdita, and thus directs him specifically to Sicilia, where Leontes will be eager to welcome Polixenes's son and beg forgiveness of his father.

While Florizel strives to uphold his pledge to Perdita, Leontes is still performing a "saint-like sorrow" (5.1.12) in Sicilia, keeping his word to mourn Hermione and Perdita for the rest of his days. Despite Cleomenes and Dion urging Leontes to wed again so that he may produce an heir to the throne and avert catastrophe to the kingdom, Paulina reminds Leontes of the oracle's word that the if the king's lost child is not found, he will not have an heir. The recovery of this child, Paulina admits, is "monstrous to our human reason" (41), and yet, Paulina emphasizes that by seeking a new heir through remarriage, Leontes would be opposing the will of the gods. Thus Paulina counsels Leontes, "Care not for issue; The crown will find an heir" (46-47). If Leontes renewed his faith in the oracle upon the death of his son, he is now exercising that faith in a practical manner, and in a way that also extends to trust in Paulina, as Leontes tells her that he would never have lost Hermione if he had listened to Paulina before, and because he can never have another wife like Hermione, he will not take another wife now (51-56). Leontes gives himself further over to Paulina's direction, swearing to never marry again except by her permission. "That / shall be when your first queen's again in breath. Never till then," (82-84) she tells him, placing Leontes in a position that seems like it can only be resolved by a miracle and in which he must exercise interpersonal faith.

With the arrival of Florizel and Perdita in Sicilia, along with the subsequent arrival of Polixenes and Camillo, who have followed them, the various ruptures caused by Leontes's lack of interpersonal faith are amended among the play's surviving characters. Interestingly, we do not directly witness Polixenes and Camillo's reunion with Leontes, Perdita, and Florizel, nor their mutual recognitions, but it is described to us through the awestruck testimony of other characters who saw it themselves. While it is possible that Shakespeare keeps that reunion offstage so that it does not take away from the sense of wonder generated by the resurrection scene that follows, it is fitting that in this play which is partly about the need for trusting the word of others, we learn about the awesome reconciliation second-hand, and at least for a moment, the audience must place its own trust in "this news which is called true" (5.2.27-28) if it is to proceed onwards to the play's final reunion. In *The Winter's Tale*'s final scene, Paulina leads Leontes and the others to what she tells them is a statue of Hermione, designed to look as she would if sixteen years had gone by and as if "she lived now" (5.3.32). Even so, Leontes says that the statue stands with "such life of majesty" (35) as Hermione appeared when he first wooed her, making him ashamed and left asking, "Does not the stone rebuke me / For being more stone than it?" (37-38). Over sixteen years of tears, Leontes has softened what was his heart of stone, though, signaling what will become the softening of the statue itself. Here the audience may have been reminded of the biblical image of divine grace turning sinners' hearts of stone into hearts of love, as the animation of the statue and Hermione's return can be said to reflect one last conversion in Leontes, which is his acceptance of Hermione's free love and forgiveness, and in turn, the king's forgiveness of himself.

Throughout *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes undergoes a transformative conversion which I have argued the play presents as world-changing in its effects. The moment Leontes starts giving

heed to the idea that Hermione has been unfaithful, the thought begins changing how he perceives himself and everyone around him. In Leontes's mind, he is one of the world's "cuckolds" (1.2.190), Hermione a "bed-swerver" (2.1.93), his daughter a "bastard" (2.3.72), Polixenes a "harlot king" (2.3.4), Camillo a "false villain" (2.1.48), Paulina a "mankind witch" (2.3.66), and the oracle a fraud. The seeming impossibility of Leontes to experience an about-face is expressed by Camillo early in the play, when he says that no matter how much Polixenes might swear he and Hermione are innocent, "you may as well / Forbid the sea for to obey the moon / As or by oath remove or counsel shake / The fabric of [Leontes's] folly, whose foundation / Is piled upon his faith and will continue / The standing of his body" (1.2.425-27). It is just as likely that Leontes will change his mind, Camillo claims, as it is to suspend a force of nature and its operation. And yet, this is exactly what happens after the death of Mamillius and Leontes accepts the voice of the oracle as a true voice of Apollo. Once Leontes's mind is aligned with that epistemic foundational point, his mental landscape changes accordingly, such that he now views Paulina as a woman who is "grave and good" (5.3.1), Camillo "a man of truth, of mercy" (3.2.154), Polixenes a "holy father" (5.1.169), Perdita his true daughter, and Hermione "the sweet'st companion that e'er man / Bred his hopes out of" (5.1.11-12). Whether the figure of the oracle can be read within the play's religious subtext as resonating specifically with Rome, James I, an ecumenical council, or any other specific person or group, the play posits the more general principle that a shared renewal of interpersonal faith in *some* living voice can heal the divisions bred by privatized religious authority. A "world ransomed, or one destroyed" (5.2.15), *The Winter's Tale* suggests, begins first with the world of the self and the mind.

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